

The Political Construction of Homeless Identities: Discourse and Contested Definitions of Homelessness

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De Montfort University, Leicester

Nicholas Mills

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Abstract

This thesis presents an analysis of both the emergence and effects of definitions of homelessness, through a consideration of the manner in which British homeless policy constructs political identities. This task is approached by an application of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) radical democratic theory to examples from policy, in order to reveal both the process of identity formation and the key discursive influences that impact on definitions of homelessness. As Neale (1997), Jacobs *et al* (1999) and others have argued, the use of social theory to analyse issues surrounding homelessness remains underdeveloped and this project attempts to fill this gap in existing research by using discourse theory to investigate changing definitions of homelessness. It therefore represents an original contribution to knowledge, as it is the first explicitly theoretical, extended investigation analysing recent British homeless policy

In the first half of the thesis existing perspectives on homelessness are reviewed and an essentialism regarding conceptions of structure and agency is identified. Radical democratic theory is then presented as a possible route past this impasse and a useful tool for the study of homelessness. Chiefly this relates to Laclau and Mouffe's contention that identities are discursively formed, unstable entities and that the presence of antagonism can challenge privileged subject positions. This theory is then applied to the three major conditional categories in homeless policy: priority need, intentionality and local connection, in order to examine the theoretical implications of these judgements. The emergence and various incarnations of these categories are considered in the context of different policies and political debates through England, Wales and Scotland.

The changeable nature of definitions through different time periods and across different geographical locations is seen to proscribe the possibility of an objective measure of homelessness and in the final chapter, the concept of radical democratic citizenship is considered as an alternative framework for inclusion within the terms of policy. The conclusion summaries the key insights of this analysis and assesses the suitability of radical democratic theory for the context of homelessness.

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Introduction

Homelessness is perhaps the most pervasive representation of inequalities in modern British society. The continued existence of homelessness as a social phenomenon, be it the absolute rooflessness of rough sleepers, those in temporary accommodation, or the ‘hidden homeless’ who may find shelter on friends floors and sofa’s acts as a dividing line in British society, where access to property has increasingly become a major determinant in both the social status and financial prosperity of individuals.

Nevertheless, the right to housing as prescribed by British housing policy is not a universal entitlement; it is regulated by policy definitions of homelessness. In order to qualify for re-housing applicants have to satisfy local authorities that they fulfil policy criterion, namely that they fall within priority need categories, that they did not make themselves homeless intentionally and that they have a connection to the local area in which they are applying. This framework has altered over time and has been changed across devolved parliaments in the UK, but ultimate access to social housing is determined by a consistent framework in which a boundary is constructed, a boundary that represents the limit of provision and consequently excludes those who do not possess certain characteristics, or who are deemed to be ineligible because of their personal history.

Therefore at the root of definitions of homelessness lies a conception of the proper role of the state in providing targeted housing assistance. By extension this is informed by a belief concerning the ability of individuals to negotiate social forces and control their own housing outcomes. This is the same set of issues that are central to accounts of identity formation, namely the relationship between individuals and power.

This study will analyse both the emergence and the effects of definitions of homelessness by considering the manner in which legislation constructs political identities. Identity in this sense refers to a particular subject position, a classification constructed by policy. This thesis presents an analysis of the normative and ideological assumptions inherent to the formation of individual positions, with expressed aim of exploring the perception of identity formation behind such changing definitions.

This analysis is undertaken through reference to theoretical debates over identity, applied to policy. Explicit theoretical approaches to homelessness are hard to find in current British research and as Neale (1997) has noted, the majority of accounts consider homelessness within a framework that privileges either structural or agency-based factors. The duality of such an approach is increasingly recognized to be inadequate as an explanation, as homelessness as a social phenomenon is unlikely to be solely caused by either shortages of housing or individual fallibility. Individuals become homeless for different reasons and any explanation focusing on particular causal factors is likely to exclude a significant number of cases.

In attempting to move beyond such a division this project does not attempt to strike a balance between structure and agency. A ‘mid-point’ explanation is likely to suffer the same drawbacks as a structural or agency-based theory, primarily because as an attempt to formulate this framework cannot account for the diverse circumstances that lead different individuals to become homeless. For example, Dyrberg (1997) criticises Giddens’ (1984) model of structuration for the way in which agency is constrained or facilitated by structural forces, as both structure and agency remain as essentialised concepts in this theory. In many cases, either structural or individual factors will simply be irrelevant as causes for homelessness and the consideration of such issues is likely to lead to exclusionary judgement.

This thesis will therefore attempt to present a critique of the essentialism inherent to the formation of homeless identities. This critique will operate by analysing the manner in which policy constructs fixed boundaries which act to exclude or include from within their terms. Such boundaries are seen to present a binary opposition, in which an individual’s claim for assistance can be judged against an official criterion of need. This duality, often referred to as the deserving/undeserving opposition, will be seen to be important for two reasons (Carlen 1996, Neale 1997). Firstly, as a theoretical position such a duality represents a division in which the diverse experiences of individuals in becoming homeless cannot be reflected in the decision making process. Effectively the essentialism of

explanations of homelessness reveals itself through binary outcomes; either individual's deserve permanent re-housing, or they do not.

This framework will be challenged through reference to a particular branch of post-structuralism, that of radical democratic theory. This perspective, developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), stresses the manner in which identities are created through particular political contexts. Crucially, identities are not purely the result of a 'top-down' imposition of meaning, but arise from the antagonistic clash between different political perspectives. Radical democratic theory will therefore be seen to be a useful tool in the analysis of homelessness, as it applies Derrida's (1978) concept of 'overdetermination' to political theory with specific reference to the process of identity formation. Identities are seen to be formed in opposition to each other, with a positive position established by reference to a corresponding negative 'other'. However, the relationship between the two is seen to be unstable or overdetermined, as a privileged identity is seen to be undermined by the elements that it lacks. Laclau and Mouffe have contended that this situation can produce antagonistic relationships, which is an ever-present possibility in the formation of binary oppositions. It is antagonism that is seen to hold the possibility of change, in this case the renegotiation of privileged and subordinated identities and therefore the boundaries of inclusion.

This point can be usefully illustrated by reference to manner in definitions have altered over time. For example, in the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* an applicant can be deemed to be homeless if there is a risk of violence in their current residence. However, this refers to domestic violence and the *Homelessness Act 2002* set out to specifically include those who were at risk of *any* form of violence (HOC, 2001). Therefore victims of racist violence or anti-social behaviour could qualify for assistance in a manner that was impossible for the twenty-five preceding years. The definition of violence was seen to be too narrow to incorporate groups that had gradually become seen to have a legitimate claim for re-housing, a case of a positive position being de-stabilised and consequently re-formulated by the elements that it lacks.

This also highlights a second point concerning this approach, the influence of discursive formations on the construction of normative boundaries. Jacobs *et al* (1999) have shown how the *extent* of policy is influenced by the level of public concern over homelessness, a constructivist position that illustrates the manner in which definitions are discursively formed. However, this project will apply the work of Foucault (1972), to illustrate that whilst homeless discourse is an unstable paradigm in the manner described by Jacobs *et al*, it is also influenced by other discourses. Thus an expanded definition of ‘violence’ can be seen to be informed by the wider government concern of the protection of victims of crime (Home Office, 2003).

Ultimately this perspective renounces the possibility of a totalised vision of society and therefore negates the formation of an objective measure of need. Definitions are viewed as a product of their context, of the political circumstance of their formation and therefore an overdetermination of homeless subject positions. This critique will be developed with particular reference to the formation of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* as it was this legislation that developed the conditional framework that survives into current English policy. Subsequent legislation will be considered and the *Homeless Act 2002* is of some importance because of its more inclusive definitions of homelessness, but ultimately it is the structure of policy that is the central concern of analysis. In this respect the *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* is of interest, as this legislation has attempted to reformulate the basis of homeless policy by disbanding several of the conditional aspects. The categories and debates surrounding this legislation will be considered as a comparison to the English example and a possible resolution of the theoretical conflicts identified through the thesis.

Having presented a critique of an objective, universal definition of homelessness, it is then necessary to suggest an alternative framework. This task will be addressed by reference to Mouffe’s (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000) development of a radical democratic citizenship, a theory that is seen to be useful because of its focus on diversity of experience. In particular, this model develops a version of citizenship that allows competing groups to negotiate rights claims within the ethical boundaries of liberal

democracy. It is important to distinguish this model from a post-modern focus on the harmonious co-existence of differentiated identities, as Mouffe maintains that the irreducibility of antagonism demands an active citizenship in which individuals and groups attempt to negotiate their position within the framework informed by the twin aims of liberty and equality.

This project therefore has several important aims. Firstly in developing a theoretical approach to the study of homelessness, this thesis attempts to develop a sustained piece of normative research in response to a perceived gap in this area. Through the investigation of changing definitions, examined within a theoretical framework, this project will attempt to highlight the nature of the relationship between individuals and social forces that is implied by the structure of homeless policy, as well as the manner in which the boundaries of inclusion are dependent on changing discursive formations.

This highlights a second aim, which is reflective of the theoretical stance adopted through this thesis. The critique of essentialism supplied by Laclau and Mouffe can be seen to be important in a variety of different ways. The rational, grounded model of identity implied by the moral judgements that inform a conditional policy are seen to form an inadequate explanation of homelessness, as it sites causal factors within the individual and therefore ignores social and political power. Conversely, an essentialism of structure is seen to be equally unrealistic, as individuals are viewed as faultless and more importantly, powerless victims of social forces. This project therefore guards against simply replacing one form of essentialism with another and therefore accepts that homelessness cannot be reduced to a problem of supply and demand.

Contextually, this thesis has the opportunity to compare the application of this perspective to contrasting pieces of British legislation. The advent of the *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* presents a policy that is broadly informed by a structuralist agenda and more importantly, a policy that attempts to address the exclusion that can result from a conditional framework. The approach to definition and the debates surrounding this formation can be usefully contrasted with English and Welsh examples and the extent to

which Scottish legislation replaces an essentialism of agency with an essentialism of structure can be assessed.

The radical democratic vision of citizenship is therefore important as an attempt to accommodate the antagonistic nature of social relations within a theory that recognises both the contingency of identity and the necessary ethical limits dictated by liberal democracy. This is useful for the study of homelessness, as a focus on the possibility of inclusion for a variety of different identities is tempered by a need for individual responsibility to assert their own positions. This version of citizenship therefore offers a means to assess individual cases in manner that can move beyond universal definitions and consider applicants on their individual merits.

Methodology

Initially it is important to consider the methodological stance adopted through this thesis. This study is unique as a sustained piece of theoretical research applied to British homeless policy and it is therefore important to justify this particular approach. Fundamentally this requires a consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of a theoretical approach and the insights that can be gained through this method, but cannot be achieved through empirical observation. I want to approach this issue by addressing some the limitations of the positivist method, before stating the methodological approach of this thesis.

In her investigation into the use of theory within homeless research Neale (1997) is critical of the lack of interpretive elements and maintains that a number of opportunities to apply the work of contemporary thinkers to this context have been missed, or remain relatively underdeveloped theoretically. For example, Neale's speculation as to the usefulness of post-modern and post-structural theory to this field remains one of the few overt attempts to broaden the canvas of research, a situation that can be attributed to the combination of a number of factors.

Firstly although research into homelessness comes from a variety of different academic disciplines, the majority of research comes from the broader field of housing studies, a discipline which has been criticised for its narrow empiricist focus (Kemeny 1992, King 1996). Although some moves have been made to rectify this situation within housing studies, much homeless research has retained a limited theoretical outlook. Unfortunately, by this focus the epistemological boundaries of the field remain unquestioned and whilst empirical data is always vital in any inquiry, what has been lacking in homeless research is an interpretative element. This is not to be seen as a hierarchical distinction, but rather a realisation that practice and empirical research operate within the discursive boundaries of the field itself and continue to report shortcomings as they find them. Thus, as King (1996) states, a theoretical study should both inform and be informed by other codes of research and practice.

In turn, this can be partly attributed to the perception that homelessness as a need based issue can have little use for the abstractions of theory at the expense of quantitative data detailing the extent of the problem. Such work runs the risk of seeming pretentious or irrelevant, particularly as so much research comes from charities and focus groups that possess a close practice based link with policy, or the homeless themselves. Therefore homelessness is frequently discussed in statistical terms; the construction of such an agenda leading to the dominance of positivistic methods, as the consideration of need is held to demand a quantifiable statement as to the extent of the problem. In this sense the collection of empirical data can be seen as a positive contribution to alleviating need. This is particularly relevant when it is considered that research into homelessness comes from a wide variety of disciplines in academia, as well as from interest groups such as Shelter or Crisis, who have their own reasons for the presentation of homeless issues in a certain manner.

A pertinent example of this is the recent *Roof* campaign ‘Who’s Counting?’ Launched in October 2001 this campaign sought to highlight the number of evictions by social landlords, contending that the majority of cases would show evictions due to rent arrears. In the light of this, the campaign called for a comprehensive count of evictions

together with increased information about the causes of such action. However, *Roof* themselves are quick to point out that this information alone does not 'answer the very big question of where people evicted from social housing go' (Delargy 2002, p.19). As the agenda of the *Roof* campaign does not question this division, one of the limitations of a positivistic approach is exposed, as the research is constrained within official guidelines.

However, the quantitative bias extends beyond the work of charities and pressure groups in this area. In a recent article on perspectives in housing research, Clapham (2002) has highlighted the dominance of positivistic assumptions even within such perspectives as the state policy approach. He argues that the central premise of such investigations is 'that they assume the existence of a world of social facts to be uncovered by researchers using quantitative and empirical research methods' (p.59). This is held to be tantamount to the portrayal of social relations as an 'objective reality' in which actors participate in a 'uniform' and 'uncontentious' manner (p.59).

The connection between the two points is immediate; that housing research is (or has been) dominated by positivistic assumptions and that the presentation of such data is likely to assume its universal value in terms of need. Clapham uses this as a starting point for the exploration of a post-modern analytical framework, a framework that demands the questioning of universal truths and the consideration of what Bauman (1992), calls the 'dissipation of objectivity' (quoted in Clapham 2002, p.61). Clapham's interest lies in the manner in which social realities are assumed and empirical data is presented in an unquestioning realisation of those realities. This of course is a bare bones account of the social constructivist perspective, an examination of the manner in which social realities are constructed through discourse. In itself it is the beginning of a justification of normative research within housing, as this is the type of research that is suited to the framework that Clapham is proposing. However, despite the common linkages between housing and homelessness there remains the problem that for many people (not least rough sleepers), homelessness *is* an objective fact and for many researchers the project of deconstruction in this context merely draws attention away from consideration of need.

Consequently a degree of caution is required when proposing the formation of a new paradigm in this area. It is perhaps too easy to justify normative research from within post-modern position with such generalisations as 'things are changing' or references to the importance of cultures in the era of globalisation. What is required in this context is a rigorous statement of methodological aims that conveys the strengths of the perspective and the manner in which it fits into the wider concerns of homelessness. In short, what a theoretical perspective can add the subject.

To this end I want to examine some of the major objections to the positivism that Clapham, Kemeny (1992) and many others have identified at the heart of housing studies. Chiefly these objections relate to the limitations of objective, scientific methods within the social sciences, as the subject matter is seen as too 'messy' and inexact to produce meaningful results. Human beings do not interact in a uniform way and thus analysis of social relations in terms of generalities and social groups is likely to gloss over important omissions or variation in opinion. From this perspective it is perhaps inappropriate to attempt universal conclusions, a key consideration in the post-modern critique that Clapham employs.

A fundamental objection to positivism is that issues of social relations are unlikely to be investigated in an impartial manner and consequently it is difficult to support positivism's claims of detachment from its subject. This opens up the question of researcher involvement, as in emotive subjects such as homelessness problems of this nature are likely to be amplified. I have already mentioned the large amount of research commissioned by charities and pressure groups which are likely to support a particular position. This not to criticise the work of Shelter or Crisis but merely to illustrate this point, as their supported publications are rarely going to recommend a non-interventionist government strategy. Such research is unlikely to exist in an ideological vacuum and thus the conclusions cannot support the objectivity that the method claims.

Related to this issue is the idea that the mere collection of empirical observations is unlikely to produce meaningful research on its own. This point relates back to Kemeny's (1992) original critique regarding the lack of interpretative research within the housing

field; the consideration that a degree of theoretical engagement is necessary to illuminate observation and clarify the issues involved in the terms of that observation. This is central to the context of homelessness as positivism proceeds without questioning its base assumptions. It is a method that essentially accepts the world as it is perceived and seeks to observe social phenomena within these terms. Consequently the definitions that frame the research remain unquestioned.

Thus, in these arguments there are strong implications for the accuracy of positivistic research as an adequate representation of social relations. This is especially central to the issue of homelessness where the problem of defining such issues as intentionality is crucial. For example, Jacobs *et al.* (1999) cite the prominence of government funding as a factor in the acceptance of official guidelines as a basis for research, a critique that offers an ideological element to the acceptance of normative boundaries. The implication for this position is that positivistic research can be driven by external perception rather than seeking to question that perception. Whilst such research is directly relevant to policy in terms of direct information, it cannot assess the terms under which that information was collected. Consequently, when we are considering need from a positivistic standpoint it becomes easy to reduce homeless issues to a simple formula for welfare supply. The detailing of numbers, the statistical accounts of the characteristics of the homeless (see Kemp 1997), or surveys on the health of single homeless people (see Bines 1997) are important contributions to knowledge in their own right, but equally can be misleading in their claims of universality. It is the assumptions that underpin such investigations that a theoretical approach to homelessness should seek to examine in order to assess the accuracy of positivistic research.

In addressing such issues, this thesis will utilise a branch of discourse analysis that Torfing (1999) refers to as *discourse theory*. Torfing develops this method from the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Zizek (1989) and Dyrberg (1997) amongst others and stresses the role that discourse plays in producing identities, or subject positions. By this he means social identities, the role that is ascribed to individuals by their position within a particular discourse. The theoretical underpinnings of this method will be discussed in chapter

3, but in general terms discourse itself is viewed as a shifting construct, renegotiated by its participants. This is not to say that the concept of power is redundant in this context, as certain actors are likely to have more influence than others in the discursive formation of norms. The task of discourse analysis in this sense is to identify the ideological conflicts, as well the areas of commonality that go towards the make-up and renegotiation of the discourse. In this sense discourse theory offers a useful grounding for the study of homeless issues, as its focus on the political nature of discourse can illuminate ideological bias.

At this point, it is worth considering the way in which this branch of theory is be used through the thesis. The method outlined by Torfing (1999) stresses the subjective link between theory and method, particularly as discourse theory stresses the impossibility of viewing society in an objective manner. In this sense, discourse theory is used as a tool with which to interpret homeless policy, an application of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) radical democratic theory. However, whilst discourse theory is used as a tool through which to critique the formation of homeless identities, the context of homelessness also provides a test for Laclau and Mouffe's framework. It is through the application of this particular branch of theory to a specific political context that its strengths can be highlighted, and any limitations identified.

As this study addresses the formation of political identities it is important to analyse the documents that create a political norm and in this sense such documents act as empirical material. It is through the interpretation of material such as policy documents and parliamentary debates that the chief political influences on the formation of definitions of homelessness can be considered. Such evidence is more instructive than empirical fieldwork for the purpose of this project, as definitions are considered as products of the discursive conditions at the time of their emergence. Therefore the analysis of discourse surrounding policy, the terms and concepts that are used by political actors, can reveal the ideological and practical influences on the framework of homeless policy. It is at this point that the theoretical function of such a framework can be analysed and the conditions for inclusion within the polity can be examined.

It is important to note that discourse theory is subjective method; indeed Laclau and Mouffe (1985) are sceptical about the possibility of viewing social relations in an objective, detached manner. The influence of post-structuralism on discourse theory demands that truths are considered within the context of their formation, that universal statements are unlikely to describe social relations in an accurate manner. Therefore truths surrounding homelessness are a product of a certain time, as well as a certain political structure and cannot be considered within a universal framework. However, in advancing this perspective it should be noted that while the model provided by radical democratic theory represents one possible interpretation of homeless policy, it is equally possible to investigate the formation of normative definitions through the application of other branches of theory. The subjective concern of discourse analysis stretches beyond individual texts and extends to the selection of the method itself.

This thesis can therefore be considered to be a normative study, in that it seeks to analyse the manner in which policy arrives at a definition. King (2003) defines normative statements as ‘prescriptive’ as they are statements that establish ‘what we should or ought to do’ (p.8). It is in this way that we can view definitions of homelessness as normative, as they prescribe the necessary conditions for an individual to be perceived as homeless and receive housing assistance. Such definitions therefore create a ‘norm’ concerning both the behaviour of individuals and the proper role of the state in providing for its citizens. This thesis seeks to analyse the emergence of these definitions and interpret the theoretical implications of both their formation and modification. It is through such an analysis that this thesis will add to existing research by presenting a thorough application of theory to political context and by beginning to question the terms and concepts that are used in order to make sense of homelessness.

Overview of the Thesis

At the root of the formation of political identities lies a normative judgement concerning both the nature of individuals within society and the corresponding responsibilities of the state in providing for its citizens. These two factors are inextricably

linked, for instance a belief in the rational power of individuals to govern their own social position places emphasis on a political system that allows individuals to maximise this potential. In such a system the focus is on the removal of state impediments to the flourishing of individual citizens, the prioritisation of liberty over a more utilitarian agenda. Accordingly, a belief in the power of culture or politics to limit the choices available to individuals, to construct subject positions, leads to a conception of the re-distributive state in which the poorer members of society should be assisted in order to compensate for their disadvantaged starting position.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of perspectives on homelessness in existing research, an overview that identifies the dominance of dichotomy noted above. The chief aim of this chapter is to outline the theoretical foundations of explanations of homelessness and identify a corresponding lack of normative research. The benefits of a theoretical approach to this context will then be discussed, with particular reference to the post-structural critique of essentialism. In chapter 2 these issues will be related to theories of identity, and the relative weaknesses of agency based and structuralist models will be identified. In opposition to the essentialism of these perspectives, the foundations of the post-structuralist perspective will then be discussed.

This will act as a prelude to chapter 3, in which the radical democratic approach is outlined and appraised. Beginning with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) initial critique of Marxism in which they utilised post-structural concepts in order to focus on the authoritarianism that they saw in an essentialist view of structure, this chapter will highlight the conception that they advance of identity formation. The major criticisms of this perspective will then be outlined, balanced with the potential benefits of this approach for the study of homelessness.

Having set out the theoretical framework, this thesis will consider more contextual material from chapter 4 onwards. Initially this will consist of a discussion of the deserving/undeserving opposition and its relationship to structure/agency. This will be examined with reference to historical examples, in particular the manner in which the homeless were differentiated to the settled poor. Some of the major contexts for the

emergence of this opposition will be considered in order to examine the appearance of a conditional approach to homelessness, as well as establishing the extent to which antagonistic relationships within discursive formations have led the reformulation of the boundary between inclusion and exclusion.

From chapter 5 onwards, the focus will shift to consider the modern inception of homeless policy. Beginning with a description of the emergence of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*, this chapter will then consider the politics of three major conditional categories within this legislation. The changes to these categories will also be considered, both within English policy and through variations in definition latterly instigated by the devolved assemblies. In chapter 5 this will consist of an examination of priority need, both in terms of the politics of the category itself and the theoretical effects of the expanded definitions within *Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002* and its Welsh equivalent. This will be shown to construct a binary opposition informed by individual circumstance, the important consideration being that this position can lead to the exclusion of individuals from provision. The proposed cessation of priority need in Scotland will then be discussed and the implications of this policy, one which will eventually remove any judgement of individual circumstance, will be considered as an embodiment of an essentialist view of social power.

Chapter 6 will develop this analysis in order to investigate the category of intentionality. Again the formation and original justifications for the category will be examined with reference to Laclau and Mouffe (1985). This will reveal the emergence of a binary opposition in the same way as priority need, but one that is dependent on the judgement of local authorities. Therefore the overdetermined nature of identity is seen to be important in this context, as the possibility of antagonism can undermine the legitimacy of a relative judgement. The Scottish re-formulation of intentionality will be important here, as in contrast to the ‘blanket’ acceptance implied by the dissolution of priority need, this category retains a degree of individual judgement. This is not used as a justification for immediate exclusion however and therefore the Scottish example is seen to offer a proper

consideration of individual behaviour, which allows applicants to negotiate their own inclusion.

Chapter 7 concludes this examination of conditional categories by considering the emergence of the need to prove a local connection. Whilst the preceding two categories were seen to offer a judgement as the proper circumstance and behaviour for individual applicants to be eligible for full housing assistance, the test of local connection determines the proper location of an individual. Again the justification for this test will be considered and the possible variations in judgement will be highlighted. The binary assessment identified in the previous two categories is only relevant in this case as an exclusion from a geographical area, but this is still deemed important as a potential impact on the ability of an individual to sustain a tenancy. The Scottish suspension of local connection is considered as a possible route past this impasse, although a degree of scepticism is shown towards the practical impact of this change.

Having used a post-structuralist critique of conditionality to deconstruct categories in homeless policy, chapter 8 will attempt to develop a framework which allows an appreciation of context whilst recognising necessary limits on plurality. Crucial to this framework will be Mouffe's (2000) recognition of the tension between liberal notions of plurality and individual rights, as opposed to the democratic idea of belonging within the political community. These two ideas are seen to be inadequate in isolation of each other, as liberal conceptions of citizenship cannot account for the role of power in the formation of identities, whilst a communitarian position is seen to suppress liberty through a focus on a normative common good. The radical democratic vision of citizenship, as a forum through which rights claims can be assessed through the assertion of identities within the universal framework of liberal democratic institutions, will therefore be considered to offer a route beyond an essentialist, conditional approach to homelessness.

The following chapters will therefore propose that the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) offers a theoretical framework with which to analyse homelessness. This framework will be used to critique existing approaches to homelessness and examine theoretical assumptions in policy. Radical democratic citizenship will then be suggested as a model

through which the exclusion of homeless applicants can be adequately addressed, before the strengths and limitations of this approach are assessed in the conclusion. Potential improvements in the theoretical framework, together with suggestions for future research, will also be discussed at this point.

Chapter 1- Existing Perspectives on Homelessness

This chapter will outline existing research on homelessness with a view to identifying the theoretical underpinnings of this work. This research will be split up to consider three related issues, those of definition, explanation and theory.

With regard to definition, this chapter will outline the manner in which definitions of homelessness can be seen to exclude significant numbers from permanent housing. This can be seen through the focus on rough sleeping as an absolute form of exclusion, as opposed to the far greater numbers in temporary accommodation. This will then be linked to the central issue for this project, the manner in which policy definitions serve to exclude those who are perceived to be unworthy of permanent re-housing.

The second issue of explanation serves as a principle through which the judgements required by definitions can be formed. Central to this section will be a consideration of the dominant paradigm in homeless research, that of structure and agency. It is this duality that this project will seek to question, as it is through the consideration of structural or agency-based factors in isolation that deserving/undeserving conceptions of the homeless can exist.

The final section will consider attempts to apply a theoretical approach to the study of homelessness. Beginning with a look at the possible benefits that a theoretical approach can bring to this context, this section will then consider the limited number of attempts to move beyond the structure/agency divide.

Defining Homelessness

‘The sight of a rough sleeper bedding down for the night in a shop doorway or on a park bench is one of the potent symbols of social exclusion in Britain today.

(Tony Blair, SEU, 1998 p.i).

Homelessness is an issue that is generally represented as a visible form of absolute poverty; an issue that is seen to be indicative of the overall health of a society. As Tony Blair states, the presence of individuals sleeping rough on the street is a constant reminder of those who struggle on the fringes of society. Wright (1997) argues that the homeless have become 'stand-ins' for the poor in both the public consciousness and political discourse; a visible representation of the abstract notion of poverty (p.1). Likewise, Pleace (1998) notes that 'there is in truth no such thing as unique social problem called homelessness and any study predicated on the assumption that it can be isolated and studied in its own right is founded on a misconception' (p.57). These points illustrate a body of opinion that views homelessness as a created social category that is the result of the interaction between varied economic, political and individual concerns; a category that serves to generate theories and explanations that are incomplete due to their narrow focus on the affected group rather than wider causal factors.

Before the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* a statutory definition of homelessness did not exist and it was only the introduction of this legislation that placed the term in the vocabulary of social policy. This does not mean that before 1977 no-one was without housing, but that the introduction of homeless legislation created a legal and political label for those in this situation. The same flurry of concern that led to the 1977 act also cemented the idea that homelessness could be separated from wider social issues as a distinct problem with its own set of causes and explanations.

Thus homelessness can be seen, both in a strict legal sense and in terms of popular representations, to be a socially constructed category. The use of the homeless as a signifier, a representation that evokes a connotative association with common myths about those without shelter, serves to focus attention on the individual characteristics of the visible cases. Wright (1997) claims that this leads to the stigmatisation of *all* of the homeless as victims or passive recipients of benefits, as the most memorable individuals are invariably those that best fit the stereotype of the 'vagrant'. In particular, he hypothesises that the focus on stereotypes serves to generalise from the characteristics of particular

individuals, with the result that a group comprising of many different circumstances can appear homogenised.

Our common perception, one that is informed by all manner of representations from pop music videos to news reports, is of the homeless as those living on the streets, those who are absolutely without shelter. Problematically, in the UK, this is actually a description of rough sleeping and here lies a distinction both in terms of perception and legal definitions, as those on the streets are not defined as homeless by statute. Rough sleeping by these terms is represented as the visible poverty, a position of absolute need. Conversely it is also presented as a social problem; ordinary people are offended by the sight of anonymous bodies sleeping in shop doorways. This has been the view taken by successive governments in the UK, for example the 1995 Consultation Paper *Rough Sleepers Initiative: future plans* stated that ‘their evident plight is distressing not only for them but also for those who live, work and visit the centre of the capital’ (quoted in Kennet 1999, p.52), whilst Tony Blair’s introduction to the Social Exclusion Unit Report of 1998 adopted a similar stance.

“Many people feel intimidated by rough sleepers, beggars and street drinkers, and rough sleeping can blight areas and damage business and tourism.’ (SEU 1998, pii)

The Rough Sleeper’s Initiative was originally opened in 1990 as a response to the increasing numbers of street homeless in London. It initially drew on explanations concerned with the vulnerability of certain individuals and Kennet (1999) notes that its aim to clear the streets of the homeless was presented as both beneficial to the homeless individual and society as a whole. Although the RSI was closed in 1993, the Social Exclusion Unit set up the Rough Sleepers Unit in 1998. This team, headed by Louise Casey, had the expressed purpose of reducing the numbers of rough sleepers to one-third of 1998 levels by 2002. It has been widely accepted that this target has been met and the

Rough Sleepers Unit has since become part of the Homeless Directorate, whilst Louise Casey has moved on to a new post in the home office.

However, in dividing between those who are defined as homeless by statute and those who are considered to be rough sleepers, the problem of definition is further complicated. For instance, Pleace (2000) claims that the notion of special treatment for rough sleepers helps perpetrate stereotypes of the homeless as either deviants or victims depending on the context. He regards each state as equally unhelpful, but is chiefly concerned by the time taken to integrate 'the new consensus' on rough sleeping into the popular consciousness. Pleace is concerned that rough sleepers become targets for the negative images that have traditionally been bestowed on the homeless and that in separating such a group by definition, reintegration (as one of the expressed aims of the RSI) is likely to be considerably more difficult to achieve.

Cloke et al (2001) similarly address the dichotomy between the homeless and rough sleepers. In particular, they agree with Pleace's interpretation and comment on the extent to which 'the focus on rough sleepers serves to distort popular appreciations of the scale, profile and location of homelessness in the UK' (p.260). In addition to this discursive function of definition, they also question the extent to which figures in this area can be relied upon to be accurate. Whilst they see no conflict in terms of the definition of rough sleeping as a practice, they argue that to enumerate this practice is unreliable as numbers are likely to fluctuate. In addition to this, fear of police action or personal attacks demand that those sleeping rough are unlikely to do so in prominent, visible places, particularly as sleeping rough is technically illegal under the terms of the *Vagrancy Act 1824*.

In commenting on perceptions of the homeless in the US, Wright (1997) claims that the dichotomy between 'street homelessness' (rough sleeping in the UK) and cases of individuals in temporary accommodation is influential in determining suitable responses. In particular, the focus on extreme cases can make short-term micro solutions seem more beneficial than pushing for larger redistributive changes (p.1). This certainly has repercussions for the UK, particularly as fears that the government focus on rough sleeping has distracted attention away from the wider issue of homelessness appear to be supported

by statistics. The aforementioned scepticism about the accuracy of rough sleeper counts notwithstanding, statistics have shown rises in wider cases of homelessness as numbers of rough sleepers have dropped.

However, in the context of UK housing law, the issue of definition is more complex than a simple dichotomy between rough sleepers and the homeless. The source text that established present definitions is the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*. This piece of legislation will be discussed in greater depth later on, as it forms the framework for subsequent policy and as such is responsible for establishing the normative structure within which homeless issues have been viewed. The structure of legislation means that in order to be classified as homeless and therefore receive full state assistance, applicants are assessed by a number of conditional categories. Legislation contains the mechanisms to enable local authorities to assess individual cases according to ‘priority need’, with individual characteristics compared against a set criteria that judges who should be given preferential treatment in finding permanent accommodation. Likewise, applications can be assessed by intention; the ‘intentionality’ clause allowing local authorities to determine whether an individual has made themselves homeless in order to be re-housed. Finally, ‘local connection’ demands that applicants have a prior association with the area in which they are applying. The provisions of the act passed unchanged into the *Housing Act 1985* and Lowe (1997) notes that although the *Housing Act 1996* repealed the earlier legislation, many of its provisions were retained. Although the *Homeless Act 2002* reversed several of the more stringent measures of the 1996 Act and extended priority need categories, the overall framework of the 1977 Act remains in place. Consequently the issues of definition raised in the wake of the 1977 Act remain pertinent in the present context and much of existing research and commentary exists in a broad consensus in viewing this legislation as the benchmark for subsequent policy.

Much of the analysis of homelessness views the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* as important in this context, chiefly because of its aim to develop a right to housing for those classified as homeless by statute. The act shifted the focus of homelessness away from the welfare departments, the implicit message being that homelessness was caused by

a lack of quality housing rather than individual failing. This in itself was a significant declaration and one Hutson and Clapham (1999) claim 'successfully challenged earlier views which had been consistent since the passing of the 19th century poor laws linked homelessness with vagrancy and idleness' (p.4). However, it should be stated that just as the recognition of homelessness as a housing issue was the chief attribute of the Act, so this in turn required that the homeless themselves became subject to official categorization in order to qualify for the right to housing. Cowan (1997) has considered this legal framework with explicit reference to the extent that it demands reference to an 'appropriate' applicant. In this context the issue of definition becomes crucial, particularly as applicants were to be judged on 'intentionality' and thus have their own role in their situation assessed. Kennet and Marsh (1999) note that such measures are necessary for policy to operate, but equally there is a strong aspect of judgement involved in using such a criteria. The politics of applying such definitions as those contained within 1977 Act will be discussed later, but the very fact that applicants were assessed for 'intentionality' suggests that a moral guideline was present in the act. Somerville (1999) concurs with this point stating that although the act marked a major achievement, it did not 'put an end to Poor Law thinking' (p.32).

Jacobs *et al* (1999) interpret the significance of the 1977 Act by way of categorizing government responses to homelessness as a socially constructed issue. For them the problem of definition is one that is inextricably linked to predominant explanations of homelessness. In the case of the 1977 Act this involves an account of the discourse that developed around homelessness in the 1970's, particularly surrounding the public reaction to the film *Cathy Come Home*. The author's note that this characterised a view of homelessness as structurally caused and this in conjunction with pressure group activity led to the 'zenith of homelessness', the passing of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* (p.17). This, they argue, was the high water mark of public concern about homeless issues and in keeping with the constructivist approach they note a gradual return to a minimalist state approach as public interest lessened. This concurs with the response afforded to the *Housing Act 1996*, as several commentators noted that this was the end product of a gradual tightening of definitions from 1986; effected with the expressed aim of excluding certain groups, for example asylum seekers (see Lowe, 1997 for a summary of these changes).

Essentially, the result of this act was that the responsibility for local authorities to provide *permanent* accommodation was removed; this came as a consequence of the 1995 ruling in *R. v London Borough of Brent, ex parte Awna*.

Research into the definitions that frame homelessness in the UK has generally been funded by government or government linked agencies. Jacobs *et al* (1999) maintain that this has hindered a comprehensive discussion of definitions as such research is likely to have its agenda pre-determined by existing policy. In essence, they claim that the contracts offered for researchers to quantify the extent of homelessness have forced an acceptance of official measures. Equally, charities have a vested interest in promoting ‘a pathological conceptualisation of the homeless as victims, this being an effective way of securing donations’ (p.22). Therefore the dissenting voices on this issue have come from independent researchers and Jacobs *et al* contend that there has been a scarcity of normative research that explores the constructed boundaries of homelessness.

However, the mere fact that US academics such as Wright (1997), Blasi (1990), Schiff (2003) and Hopper (1991) have noted the differentiated manner in which issues of homelessness are discussed indicates that this construction results from larger factors than legislation specific to Britain. Whilst our current (British) understanding of homelessness may be framed by definitions within policy, clearly the creation of the homeless as a distinct social group did not begin solely with the 1977 Act. Instead, the definitions contained within this legislation and adapted for more current policy were themselves influenced by wider suppositions about the characteristics of the poor generally, and those without housing in particular.

Explanations of Homelessness

Existing research into homelessness has been generally concerned with quantifying the extent of homelessness, the problems that arise from this exercise in terms of definition and visibility, the normative strands that inform our own perceptions and thus impact on definitions, together with related issues such as local authority variance in interpreting

guidelines. All of these issues are in some way influenced by different attitudes as to the predominant causes of homelessness and this in turn is likely to have a bearing on the recommendations of research. In this section I want to look at some of the recent research into this area and identify the major perspectives that have emerged.

The literature in this area stems from a range of disciplines and consequently a variety of factors are considered in existing explanations. Therefore there is a predominantly policy based analysis (Kennett and Marsh 1999), a legal perspective (Lowe 1997, Carlen 1996, Cowan 1997), a concern with discursive and media representations of the homeless, mainly in US literature (Huckin 2002, Wright 1997) and a growing body of work that seeks to document the experience of homelessness (May 2000, Thomas and Dittmar 1995, Watson and Austerberry 1986). Increasingly there is a realisation that 'homelessness is a highly ambiguous and intangible phenomenon' and that a simplistic approach is unlikely to be illuminating (Neale 1997, p.48). As Kemeny (1992) has stated with reference to the broader discipline of housing studies, it is through such a wide ranging focus that research can begin to highlight issues beyond the simple supply of housing. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition that research on homelessness needs a greater theoretical input in seeking to account for the multi-faceted nature of the issue.

As Neale (1997) has stated, literature seeking to uncover the causes of homelessness can be grouped into two predominant concerns. These two perspectives are broadly classified as explanations that focus on structural reasons for homelessness, or those that concentrate on individual responsibility for providing shelter. Traditional conceptions of left and right in politics would see these explanations attributed to the extreme of the contrasting perspectives; the culpability of individual settling with a traditional conservative ideology, whilst structural explanations suggest a need for more (or perhaps a different form of) state provision. Whilst it is inappropriate to discuss such an issue in terms of polarities, the normative assumption at the root of structural explanations for homelessness suggests that a lack of affordable housing is at the root of homelessness, whilst agency based explanations concentrate on the effect that the behaviour or vulnerability of an individual has on their situation.

Explanations of homelessness are simultaneously varied and incomplete. Few researchers have commented on the structure and agency divide without noting the futility of producing a comprehensive explanation by these means. However, few policy or discursive responses to the issue exist independently of this causal debate. In particular, the manner in which homelessness is defined reveals sympathies or otherwise with certain explanations. Some research has sought to analyse this phenomenon by considering changes in macro politics, although it would be unrealistic to suggest that such an analysis of structural forces constitutes a complete explanation of the causes of homelessness. More fitting a description would be that such research seeks to show the effects of policy in terms of ideological trends and the resultant changes in the homeless population. Whilst such an analysis is likely to struggle in offering a complete account of homelessness, it offers a political context to explanations of homelessness.

Kennet and Marsh (1999) discuss an example of this by citing the ‘new homeless’, those who have fallen victim to structural forces in the last twenty five years (p.1). This they attribute to breakdown of political consensus on welfare policy and the ‘external pressure upon governments of all political complexions, which required them to reduce welfare spending’ (p.5). Furthermore, the fiscal pressure that has resulted in this reduced expenditure has in turn reduced the willingness of the state to intervene in housing markets. Consequently, such policies as the ‘right to buy’ reduced government involvement in housing and limited the stock of tenancies available to local authorities. By this measure a real lack of affordable housing lies at the root of homelessness, this in turn being the result of wider economic factors.

However, Kennet and Marsh also highlight another interpretation of this economic explanation. This is an explanation that concurs with the justification given above, but states that the fiscal pressures described were simply used as a way of enforcing a pro-market ideology. Carlen (1996), for example, points to a neo-liberal discourse that justified punitive measures against the poor by way of reference to the ‘overload’ theories of the seventies, as well as more overt and recent references to the ‘feckless underclass’ (p.27) . In this way, the breakdown of the post-war consensus on welfare in general and housing in

particular, is supposed to have a direct influence on the number of homeless individuals, as well as the nature of their situations.

Whilst this approach is useful for determining political approaches to homelessness, it stops short of being a comprehensive causal explanation. The ‘top-down’ nature of macro-structural approaches is illuminating as a record of the changing opportunities open to the homeless, but can only account for changes in the availability of housing or welfare provision. Clearly this only offers a one-sided explanation of the causal factors relevant to the continuation of homelessness and can do little to enlighten as to the role of individuals. A case in point is the promotion of pro-market ideology under the Thatcher governments, as whilst changes in housing provision at this time undoubtedly increased the number of homeless individuals, this does not mean that such measures were solely responsible for homelessness as a social phenomenon. The analysis of macro-structural forces in this context offers an explanation of the influence of ideology on the extent of homelessness, rather than a holistic account of causal factors.

Conversely, the consideration of individual characteristics in isolation has also provoked criticism. Neale (1997) points to two dominant strands of agency based explanations in existing literature, both based around the influence that individual characteristics hold over homelessness. The first she refers to as the ‘victim blaming approach’, a fairly self evident concept (p.49). This infers that the individual is responsible for their own housing situation and having failed to provide for themselves, they are undeserving targets for extended state assistance. This is the same mode of thinking that Jacobs *et al* (1999) argue was prevalent before *Cathy come home* and was embodied by provision under the *National Assistance Act 1948*; a provision that Richards (1981) and Richards and Goodwin (1997) describe as a direct descendant of the New Poor Law, with many of the dehumanising traits of the workhouse retained.

Some of these traits can be identified in the position adopted by the Social Exclusion Unit’s report on rough sleeping (1998) and an individualistic view has been explicitly referred to in Tony Blair’s forward. Likewise, Louise Casey has spoken of the

difficulties faced by the Rough Sleepers Unit in trying to persuade members of the rough sleeping community to accept the assistance that has been offered to them.

‘It’s a bloody big challenge, helping an ex-serviceman, a guy happy on the streets with his drinking friends, who is perfectly capable of sleeping outside and won’t believe it’s bad for him. Making him believe its okay living five miles out of the city centre and he will get some mates, it’s a tough job’ (Interview with the *Big Issue*, May 12th, 2001).

The implications of this position reveal an explanation based on a combination of vulnerability and individual choice and it is interesting to note the perceived reluctance of many rough sleepers to take up hostel places. Certainly this quote, in tandem with the ‘coercive’ tactics employed against rough sleepers, raises a number of issues concerning freedom of choice and movement. Waldron (1993) has addressed these issues by focusing on individual rights to construct an argument against the policing of rough sleepers.

Despite this, it is instructive to note that whilst the continuation of rough sleeping is attributed to individual’s inability or refusal to access services, point 2:6 of the SEU report notes that it is ‘not true that beds are available if only rough sleepers would take them’ (SEU, 1998 p, 3). This point implies that the amount of available hostel accommodation does not meet demand, but whilst more recent research has noted that more has to be done in this area; criticisms of existing provision have focused more on the quality of the accommodation provided. For example, the 2002 report from the homeless directorate notes that whilst the physical availability of hostel places in some areas is still a problem, a far greater concern are problems of access, in particular eligibility criteria that may exclude individuals who are drug users. In addition to this, the support services in hostels come under scrutiny in the report and the directorate plans to introduce hostel inspectors. The focus on vulnerability requires that hostels act as more than lodging housing and have the expertise and facilities to make an active difference to the lives of their clients.

Recent approaches to rough sleeping have concentrated on the pathology of individuals, an approach that Pleace (2000) claims may be no more helpful than the individualistic explanations that dominated the political approach prior to the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*. Such an explanation upholds the view that to some extent, homelessness results from individual failings and whilst there is recognition of the diverse factors that lead to homelessness, ultimately there remains an impression that homelessness is a tangible social problem that can be treated by correcting the behaviour of individuals.

Much of the research on agency based explanations has in fact been a critique of successive government's individualistic approaches to welfare. In contemporary homeless research there are few, if any, examples of researchers appealing to the stereotypes of 'deviants, dossers, alcoholics, vagrants and tramps' that characterised the popular vision of the homeless until the 1960's (Neale 1997, p.49). Some research has focused on quantifying the instances of drug misuse, alcoholism or mental health problems amongst the homeless (Rowe *et al* 2001), but in contrast to the 'blame the victim' approach, this explanation attempts to combine individualistic causation with collective solutions. This second strand of agency explanation again focuses on the pathology of the individual, focusing on the characteristics that may make some people more vulnerable to negative structural forces. Here, whilst the explanation is individualistic, the solutions offered tend to favour increased welfare provision. Pleace (2000) notes the existence of a significant body of work that stresses the role that individual circumstances play in homelessness (for example Hutson and Liddiard, 1994), but states that to ignore structural factors shows a one-dimensional approach. It is the eventual emergence of a 'halfway-house' explanation drawing on the work of Giddens (1994), that Pleace claims is a reliable yardstick for the government's present position forming 'a new consensus' on explanations of homelessness. This perspective assumes that the relevant resources are in place in terms of material provision and if assistance is required it is in the decision making process of the individual. As such, it is only an agency explanation insofar as homelessness is seen as a result of the individual's inability to negotiate access to services; a position that will explicitly considered later on with reference to the *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003*

Theory and Homelessness

Increasingly this attempt to combine structural and individualistic causal factors is seen as the most accurate explanation of homelessness. However, as Neale states, 'there are not likely to be any simple explanations of homelessness, or utopian solutions that meet the diverse needs of all homeless people' (p.59). Consequently, in recent years, and particularly in the wake of Neale's work, there have been some attempts to utilise the branches of social theory that stress the diversity of experience. However, whilst some studies have begun to look at the benefits of the theoretical evaluation of assumptions surrounding the homeless, these have predominantly acted as 'signposts' to future research rather than providing a comprehensive investigation. For example, in addition to Neale's study, Watson (1999) has considered how the work of Foucault could be applied to homelessness and has presented a short overview detailing the application of his ideas on power and discourse under the banner of a 'new social imaginary' (p.47). Both of these studies reiterate the need for research to become more critically engaged and in particular, to assess the relevance of post-modern theory. It is hoped by both Watson and Neale that such an engagement would lead to the end of the search for unattainable meta-theories and focus on 'paying attention to local contexts and the locally different effects of policies on different groups of people' (Watson 1999, p.95). This is a common cry from those within the post-modern canon, the focus on difference and microanalysis being central to the perspective. However, both Watson and Neale recognise the limited scope of their own investigations as well as the need to progress this analysis.

Neale's evaluation of post-modern theory is relevant here, primarily for its conclusion. Neale questions some of the facets of post-modern and post-structural theories on the basis that whilst they provide a loose framework for recognising that experiences of both the causes and realities of homelessness are subjective, they are flawed in the ultimate implications of their position. In some general points on the practical uses of such theories, she expresses scepticism that deconstructive techniques can be used to make a meaningful contribution to research on homelessness. Post-modernism's insistence on the centrality of

language, coupled with a cynicism towards universal interpretation is seen to ruin any attempt to define homelessness for practical purposes, purely because any such definition is likely to be susceptible to deconstruction. Equally, post-structuralism is seen to concentrate exclusively on the subjective, especially micro-power and therefore value agency factors above structural ones. Neale is adamant that a recognition of structural power as a tangible influence on homelessness is central to any emerging perspective; post-structuralism's rejection of authority seemingly placing it at odds with the practical ambitions of policy makers.

However, Neale is careful to state that despite initial problems in applying post-structuralism and post-modernism such theories can offer a useful critique of perspectives on homelessness. What is required in this context is a 'flexibility and a willingness to combine reason with relativity according to circumstances', in order to combat what Neale sees as the tendency towards irrationality in some post-modern theory (p.56). She hopes that by advocating the use of post-modern perspectives in a restrained manner, and in association with other perspectives, a more accurate theoretical framework may emerge.

Although Neale maintains that her investigation should only be read as an exploratory study, she tentatively proposes Giddens' (1979, 1984) theory of structuration as a useful framework to advance explanations beyond the structure agency divide. This model represents a compromise between structure and agency based influences on social position. It recognises a degree of autonomy, in that individuals have the ability to challenge social structures, whilst in turn, social structures make individual action possible. However, social institutions are reproduced by the existence of 'mutual knowledge', which dictates patterns of behaviour and therefore maintains power relationships within a society.

Such a theory is attractive as it offers a way of bypassing the impasse created by the structure/agency divide. However, as Dyrberg (1997) has noted, this is a 'reformulation' of the duality, rather than an attempt to reassess the manner in which power operates (p.4). As such, structuration does not 'explain how the meaning of concepts and structural forces can be retained without losing a sense of their subjectivity and relativity' (Neale 1997, p.57). The implication of this position is that structuration cannot account for

the plurality of experience in homelessness, purely because of the essentialism common to its conception of both subject and object.

This requires that Neale's conclusions are subject to a degree of reassessment. Whilst she acknowledges that post-structural theories can provide the fluidity to adequately conceptualise social relations in a manner that circumvents some of the problems encountered by the structure/agency divide, it is the ultimately circular nature of these arguments that lead her to limit her endorsement of such theories. Chiefly, the charge she levels against post-structuralism and post-modernism is that their focus on the subjective can lead to a relativism that stifles any hope of political action. Neale's caution is based on her assessment that the language based focus of post-modernism leads to overly subjective understanding of homelessness, as 'individuals can, therefore, be roofless and yet maintain that they are not homeless because their home is on the streets' (p.55). By this standard the reverse may also be true; those in excellent accommodation may not feel at home and could therefore claim to be homeless. Neale's point is that in concentrating on individual's interpretation of the truth of their housing situation, any practical measure of homelessness is lost.

This charge of relativism is one that is frequently levelled against 'post' theories and is one that Laclau (1990) has explicitly addressed whilst discussing the criticisms aimed at 'post-Marxism'. Firstly, he quotes Rorty (1982) on the misinterpretation at the heart of accusations of relativism.

'Relativism is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about *any* topic, is as good as every other. No one holds this view...The philosophers who get *called* 'relativists' are those who say that the grounds for choosing between such opinions are less algorithmic than had been previously thought.' (Quoted in Laclau, p.104, original emphasis)

Laclau's development of this position is to state that far from proposing a dissipation of truth, the proposition at the heart of post-Marxism is that truth is bound by context. He uses the example of a diamond, as whilst the physical object is the same whether it is in a rock-face or a jewellery shop, it only becomes a commodity within a certain social environment. Thus truth is constructed only insofar as it is agreed, or perhaps imposed, within a system of social relations. In this light, Neale's argument seems to be a somewhat exaggerated position. Definitions of homelessness vary according to the political regime in place; many people classified as homeless in the UK would not receive the same label, or indeed assistance, in the US. Even within the UK decision making of this nature can be extremely localised with laws differing through England, Scotland and Wales.¹ According to Laclau, the truth of an individual's homelessness would not be an arbitrary, subjective decision, but a constructed value based on the norms of a society.

This argument is far from exhaustive and will be developed at a later stage, but it does demonstrate that a post-structuralist critique can analyse the fluidity of meaning within a system of social relations, rather than producing an external, subjective assessment. However, what is required is an explanation of the role of the subject in this system, specifically the role that individuals can play in amending their own situation. In the next chapter I wish to consider the relationship between individuals and social power within a specific theoretical framework, that of identity formation.

Summary

This chapter has considered existing research on homelessness through reference to three major issues. Firstly, research on the definition of homelessness has concentrated on the distinction between rough sleeping and wider instances of homelessness, as well as the manner in which UK legislation limits the states responsibility by adopting a conditional agenda through which individuals who are seen to be culpable their own homelessness can be excluded. This is a critical point for this thesis; as such definitions are informed by

¹ Differences between homeless legislation in England, Scotland and Wales will be considered in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

dominant explanations of homelessness and therefore particular visions of identity formation.

Therefore the second issue, explanations of homelessness, was heavily linked to the issue of definition. Much of the research discussed in this chapter falls within the structure/agency dichotomy, a division that was seen to be unhelpful as it encourages the judgement of individual applicant's worthiness.

The third issue of theory and homelessness arose from the need to move beyond such a duality of explanation. The benefits of a theoretical approach were considered, before a paucity of normative research on homelessness was identified. Neale's (1997) consideration of the possible benefits of various approaches to homelessness was identified as helpful, although her endorsement of structuration was rejected as a mere reformulation of the structure/agency divide.

However, if Neale's conclusions are to be rejected, then an alternative framework with which to analyse homelessness is needed. With this in mind the next chapter will review the structure/agency divide in more theoretical terms, with specific reference to theories of identity. Central to this chapter will be the criticisms aimed at essentialist models of identity, be they structuralist or agency based. It is hoped that through the consideration of such issues this analysis can be moved forward to a more contingent model, in which the diversity of experience amongst homeless people can be properly accounted for.

Chapter 2- Theories of Identity

This chapter will attempt to provide an overview of major theories of identity, concentrating on the impact that each have on the structure/agency debate as outlined in chapter one, and leading into the implications for any application to homeless issues. Beginning with a definition of identity, this chapter will then examine traditional, agency based models of identity. Objections to this perspective will be considered by highlighting the structural elements to identity formation that can remain unaccounted for by focusing purely on an individual's ability to rationally choose their own identity. This chapter will then look at the challenges to the essentialism of both subject and object that are integral to both structural and agency based models of identity and summarise the initial implications for the study of homelessness.

Introducing identity

A precise definition of identity is difficult to arrive at, primarily because of the many different contexts in which the term appears. It is a word that is frequently referred to in popular culture as well as in academic writing, and for this reason it is extremely important, initially, to be clear about exactly which sense the term is being used. For example, identity is commonly used to describe a representation of the sense of self; the knowledge held by an individual about what is important to them. By this definition identities come to represent the psychological 'core' of an individual; an external expression that implies an essential, inevitable connection between identity and the individual. However, there are many obvious factors that prevent individuals from assuming the social position that they desire and can even be seen to be fundamental in influencing the nature of this desire itself. Thus, the first point to make about identities is that they are social representations and as representations, are governed by social and cultural factors.

Thus, to initially clarify terminology, the term identity does not represent social actors in their entirety. Instead, individuals assume given social positions and it is these

positions to which we are referring to when we discuss identity. Discussions about identity therefore centre on the politics of selection; how identities are chosen by, or imposed upon, individual social agents and it is this situation that leads Hall (1996) to prefer to talk of *identity formation* rather than the nebulous term identity. Such a term encapsulates the idea of a process, as it is the manner in which individuals assume given social positions that is deemed to be important.

Consequently, both the formation and selection of identities are seen to be enmeshed in external social relations. In this sense identity can be described in terms that relate to the membership of a group, on both the macro and micro social levels. Thus, identity can refer to a national belonging, membership of a social class or localised single issue groups. Identity in this sense refers to common characteristics; an external collection of unifying factors that can be adopted by, or attributed to, individuals. By this definition identities represent the traits that are shared by a given collection of individuals and therefore exist as external social classifications.

Thus, the *politics* of identity occur at the point of selection and it is the ‘play’ of forces at work in this selection that are at the root of debates on identity. This debate encompasses wide ranging questions as to the nature of human beings as well as the role of politics in shaping social agents. The question of individual autonomy is central to this issue, as contention exists as to the extent to which individuals are ‘positioned’ into identities by social forces, as opposed to consciously choosing which identities to adopt. Thus, whilst identity is viewed as a social phenomenon, there remains a debate as to the extent to which individuals can rationally choose their own position.

This has led some theorists to view identity as a mode of *self-presentation*. By this measure we can view identity as the manner in which, or even the *locus* through which, individuals view themselves and are perceived by the world. Just as we can see identity as a social and therefore external idea, so there is a flipside at its psychic roots. It is this mode of thought that provokes Whitebrook (2001) to discuss identities in terms of narratives, ‘a matter of the stories that persons tell others about themselves, plus the stories others tell about those persons and other stories in which those persons are included’ (p.4). Thus

identity is something like ‘what the self shows the world’ together with ‘what of the self is recognised by the world’ (p.4).

Immediately certain questions reveal themselves as a result of this proposition. The first is to ask whether this division between social or external identities and the core values of the self is a genuine or even useful one. A conception that draws on the understanding that the self universally contains the apparatus needed for intentional selection can have the effect of underplaying the influence that social forces play in the initial creation and consequent positioning of individuals in certain identities. Initially we can identify clear political implications at the heart of this argument. For example, explanations that stress the power of rational thought can be clearly extended to set criteria in policy, as the emphasis placed on the ability of individuals to achieve their own ends demands a corresponding responsibility to assume the consequences of their choices.

In contrast to this, a more socially determined conception of identity helps to shed some light on the role of social forces in excluding certain individuals. However, is it helpful to stress the influence of power on identity formation and imply less individual responsibility for the adoption of certain positions? Such an argument can run the risk of structural determinism, reducing individuals to passive victims of social forces. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that the homeless by the very nature of their material position are more open to negative structural influences than the majority of society, we have seen in chapter one that structural accounts are neither wholly accurate, nor necessarily helpful explanations.

The division between rationally chosen and discursively formed identities is by no means a hard and fast distinction and the analysis of identity should question the polarity of these positions. Essentially this dichotomy does not offer a development of the structure/agency dualism identified in chapter one, but it is the analysis of the ‘play’ between the two sides that characterise theories of identity and offer a route beyond the impasse encountered in existing explanations of homelessness. It is any discrepancy that may exist between the two positions that is central to the analysis of homelessness, as such a discrepancy indicates the influence of social forces that may prevent individuals assuming

their chosen identity. The examination of these debates is crucial in assessing the political implications of identity, whether it is formed by rational choice or by more discursive means.

Consequently, discussing identity immediately poses several conceptual questions. Firstly, different models of identity stress different factors in why certain positions are adopted rather than others, and thus the selection of the theoretical model assumes a great importance in the negotiation between social and agency based influences. This is crucial to the project of applying theories of identity to homelessness, as whilst many theories of identity attempt to develop the structure/agency paradigm, the overall bias of the theory holds key significance for the direction of this project. With this in mind the next section will begin this analysis by considering the constituent parts of rationally chosen identity.

The Implications of ‘Chosen’ Identity

The undeserving/ deserving opposition is one that has been given considerable attention in studies of homeless policy (Carlen 1996, Neale 1997, Somerville 1999) and at the heart of this opposition is an assumption of personal responsibility. Such an axis implies that an individual can be deemed to be culpable for their position, as the suggestion that policy can label certain individuals to be undeserving of assistance implies that they alone are responsible for their situation. Consequently this division suggests a definite model of the manner in which identities are selected, as by adopting a perspective that sees agents choosing rationally between alternatives, so an individual can be required to assume the consequence of that choice. To see a policy promoting the classification of individuals as either deserving or undeserving of assistance is to see it actively subscribe to a view of identity formation that stresses individual rationality at the expense of uncontrollable social forces. Thus accounts of homeless policy that have stressed the role of that policy in creating an deserving/undeserving division have seen legislators working to a model of identity that is based on the ability of individuals to actively choose appropriate positions.

Furthermore, the granting of assistance to certain individuals involves a certain 'marking' of their identities; the implication that they, for whatever reason, have not been capable of ensuring a certain standard of life for themselves. Whether we agree with this proposition or not, there appears to be definite assumptions and judgements at the heart of this discourse surrounding the homeless, ones that we can reasonably suggest involve a degree of certainty about the way that identity works and individuals make decisions. The mere fact that the deserving/undeserving duality has provoked so much opposition within studies of homelessness demands that this rational model is subject to some scrutiny. Of course, documenting models of rationally chosen identity demands a necessary generalisation, not least because the nature of rationality itself has proved to be extremely contentious and has concerned philosophers for over two thousand years. Consequently, this section will limit itself to identifying the contextual issues relevant to a rationally chosen model of identity, rather than attempting to document the numerous different accounts of rationality.

Models of rationally chosen identity are often associated with the Enlightenment, for example Archer (2001) refers to the rational agent as 'modernity's man' and links this mode of thought to the dominant discourse of progress and scientific advancement (p.51). Archer sees this discourse as offering the 'Clint Eastwood of the eighteenth century', a figure 'who was necessarily a chooser, because he was no longer embedded in, let alone constituted by, tradition' (p.51). The popular presentation of this time in history, as represented in Berman's (1982) second period of modernity, supports this position by emphasising a belief in progress at the expense of tradition. By this criterion identity through the enlightenment centres on self-creation; the human agent by this measure is the sole author of identity, narrative being constructed through rationality and the measured negotiation of the social.

However, this rationality is not necessarily seen as the natural state of human beings, instead it is seen as a goal to be attained. If we look back through the history of philosophy, we can see Aristotle distinguishing between animals and humans on the basis of their *telos* or purpose (Lofpso p.31). Likewise Farrer situates the attained notion of

rationality by stating that ‘choice is exercised by us, appetite comes upon us’ (quoted in McQuarrie 1973, p.192).

Those seeking to explain enlightenment models of the self in terms of unified, essentialist concepts often overlook this division. The process of rational thought thus demands something akin to the extreme example of Freudian therapy; that is the primacy of the ego over the drives. Indeed, Kant refers to irrational or immoral behaviour as belonging to the realm of the *pathological* and whilst this term should not be confused with its unfortunate Freudian overtones, it illustrates the split at the heart of rational models. Zupancic (2001) expands this point by drawing the parallel between Kant and psychoanalysis (albeit Lacan rather than Freud) and stating that ‘our inclinations and deepest convictions are radically pathological’ (p.23). A further illustration of this split is provided in the Zizek’s (2000) paraphrasing of the unconditional ethical imperative; ‘you can do your duty, because you must do it’ (p.133).

Thus by this generalised account of chosen identity we can see that rational behaviour is something that is set as a benchmark for individuals, something to be fought for. However, just as this mode of behaviour is to be reached towards, so a failure to achieve it has its own consequences. The assumed exercise of choice carries with it the inherent judgement of decisions and a consequent responsibility to choose rationally. What is missing from this picture is the extent to which the rational process is influenced by social forces and therefore the next section will concentrate on introducing theories that see identity as a more structurally determined construct.

Structural Theories of Identity

The last section considered a notion of identity as a position chosen by a rational subject; an agent that is the centre of meaning. This section will concentrate on the other side of the structure/ agency dualism, namely structuralist models of identity. Whilst the last section saw individual agents as the sole authors of identity, as constituted prior to social forces, structural theories see identity purely as a result of social forces. Structuralist

theories therefore abandon the rational agent and concentrate on identity as a phenomenon that is formed entirely by power. The difference between these perspectives, in terms of ability to formulate identities is summarised in relation to homelessness in fig. 2:1.

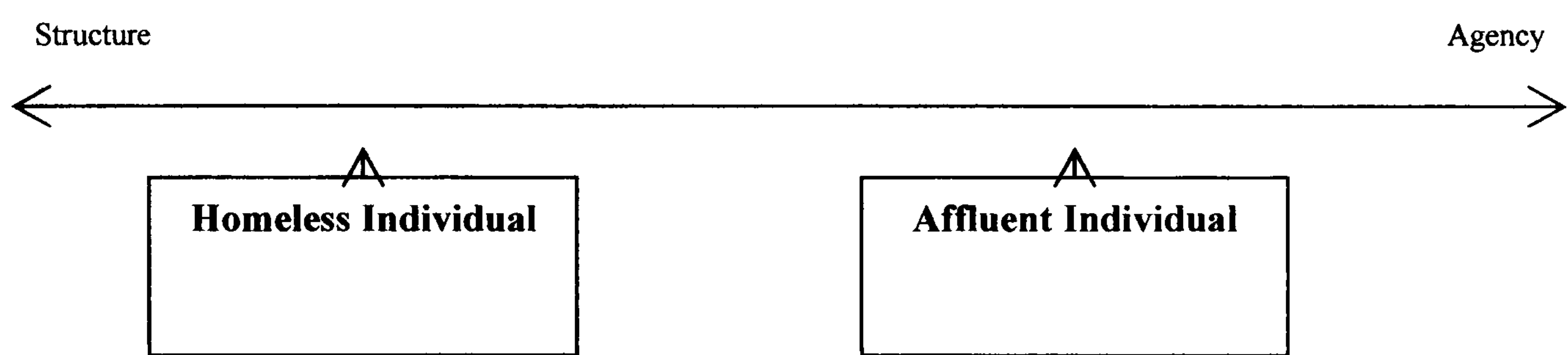


Fig 2:1: Example of contextual influence on identity formation

Dyrberg (1997) characterises the difference between the two positions by stating that models of rationally chosen identity assume an *external* relationship between power and identity, with the subject fully constituted prior to structure and possessing the necessary faculties to negotiate social forces. Dyrberg notes that this is the reason that essentialist theories concentrate on minimising the impediments to this negotiation through the consideration of individual rights, as such a perspective is geared towards allowing individuals to utilise the power that is granted by their full constitution. In contrast to this, structuralism sees the relationship between social forces and identity as an internal one, with the individual subject removed entirely. Identity in this sense is fully constituted by structure, with the essentialism of the individual replaced by an essentialist view of power. This is a central point with regard to structure/agency divide, as both extremes in this dualism assume that either subject or object is the author of practice. Archer (2000) characterises this by citing identity as a product of social structure as an example ‘downwards conflation’ (p.86).

There is considerable variance in structuralist conceptions of identity. In general terms, structuralism was originally conceived as linguistic theory, developed from De Saussure's concern with the structures of language and the manner in which meaning is constructed through the laws that regulate language. As a result, language is discussed in terms of its formal aspects rather than its uses or the consequences of its uses. In short, structuralism is concerned with what Saussure refers to as *langue* (the rules of language) rather than *parole* (the uses of language in context). It is this focus that Ricoeur (1976) contends is at the heart of debates on language, as the semiotic concern with *langue* leaves it as a 'closed' self-referential system that 'is no longer treated as a 'form of life', as Wittgenstein would have it, but as a self-sufficient system of inner relationships' (p.6). In short, the structural elements of language are not necessarily illuminating by themselves; it is only in relation to wider discourse that they begin to take on political significance.

Consequently structuralism involves a necessary generalisation in its analysis as whilst it considers that meaning is specific to a given culture at a particular moment, meaning is generated through the laws of language that are seen to govern interpretation. Essentially this 'top-down' approach leaves language and culture generally as un-reflexive tools, with little room for the possibility that the intended meaning as defined by the structure of language may 'slip' during its reception. Within structural theories of identity this problem is magnified, as the formal, repressive nature of structure means that power itself becomes an essential, fixed construct.

Structuralist theories have often been associated with Marxism. The two perspectives have common concern for influence of political structures on the individual and many structuralist thinkers became involved with socialist politics in the 1960's. For example, Lilla (2001) points to Foucault's involvement with left wing politics in the wake of the 1968 Parisian student's revolt and highlights the role of structuralist thinkers in proposing a doctrine for French politics at this time. However, the structuralist thinker who had the keenest Marxist leanings was Althusser and it is in his work that it is possible to see the fundamental break that linguistic structuralism made with orthodox Marxism. This break occurs in the two perspectives' view of the individual subject. Archer (2000) clarifies

Marx's conception of a rational subject at the heart of social relations, biologically driven to be 'committed to *continuous practical activity in a material world*' (p.122, author's emphasis). Furthermore, this 'practical work in the world does not and cannot await social instruction, but depends upon a learning process through which the continuous sense of self emerges' (p.122). Such a conception presents a rational agent with a settled sense of self, attempting to negotiate the social through learned behaviour.

Crucially for the structuralist perspective, Althusser's (1992) work involves an anti-humanist reading of Marx in which individuals are a mere effect of structural arrangements. This is problematic, in that by not investing a significant degree of rationality in the individual subject, social forces take on an essential, overbearing character, which individuals cannot hope to resist power. Adopting this deterministic view of human beings goes against most of the thought that preceded Althusser and consequently he attempted to justify this exceptionally 'thin' view of the subject in his *Ideological State Apparatus* (1992) essay. Althusser's conclusion confirms this position;

'The individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject ie. that he shall freely accept his subjection* ie. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.*' (p.62 author's emphasis).

Althusser attempted to develop a conception of the subject to fit in with his structural leaning by incorporating Lacanian psychoanalysis into his model. He focused on the notion of misrecognition in order to describe a process whereby social forces symbolically attempt to 'hail' the subject into a given identity. Ideology works to make choices self evident, giving the illusion of a free selection. Consequently, the subject is required to invest in this position through what Žižek (1999) refers to as a 'false autonomy'; that is a position whereby the subject confirms their identity as an autonomous

being whilst not being aware that this is purely a representation (p.258). Žižek contends that, 'ideological identification succeeds precisely inasmuch as I perceive myself as a 'full human person' who 'cannot be reduced to a puppet, to an instrument of some ideological big Other' (p.258). Althusser's proposition is that it is at this moment that ideology has fulfilled its function and positioned the unwitting individual.

However, the *Ideological State Apparatus* essay has been widely criticised for a misinterpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis in support of Althusser's proposition that the subject is purely a result of ideology. Hall (1996) draws attention to Hirst's critique of this idea; a critique that concerns the nature of interpellation and its recognition by the subject. This recognition, Hirst argues, is dependant on the fact that the 'subject would have been required to have the capacity to perform before it had been constituted within discourse as a subject' (Hall p.21). Or as Žižek (1999) puts it:

'If then, as Althusser would have put it – the perception that, prior to interpellation, the subject is always-already there is precisely the effect and proof of successful interpellation, does not the Lacanian assertion of a subject prior to interpellation/subjectivization repeat the very ideological illusion that Althusser endeavours to denounce? (p.258)

Problematically for Althusser it would appear that the conception of the subject in Lacan is too 'thick' or 'ever-present' to support his claims. This example highlights a fundamental problem in structuralist views of identity, in that the attempt to remove the subject from analysis leads to it becoming extremely difficult to account for the manner in which identities are selected. The process of completely de-centring the individual as the author of meaning is the development that negates the very possibility of individual autonomy and paradoxically relegates human beings to becoming effects of society, as if society itself was not created by human beings. This is not to suggest that social structure

does not hold a strong influence over the selection of identities, but rather that structure should not be seen as an impenetrable totality.

It does not seem realistic to suggest that individuals have no impact on either their own position or the wider social environment and this essentialist conception of structure leaves it as an un-reflexive concept. This is a pessimistic view of the formation of identity, as the view of power as unchanging and inescapable leaves little opportunity for personal or political change. This is especially unhelpful for those in marginalized positions, such as the homeless, because whilst the structuralist perspective dissolves individual liability by acknowledging the considerable social forces at work in the formation and selection of identities, the underplayed nature of the subject does not allow for any individual resistance to, or influence on, social structure.

The Contingency of Identity²

Thus far this chapter has concentrated on developing the theoretical underpinning to structure/agency dualism in identity formation. The models of identity discussed in this chapter share a common feature in that both perspectives insist on the essentialism of either structure or agency. As we have seen, both conceive identity as settled phenomenon and both have extreme consequences in terms of rendering individuals either culpable for their position, or as passive victims to un-reflexive social forces. Clearly both extremes offer an exaggerated position and to further this analysis it is important to balance the contrasting influences on identity formation within the context of homelessness. To do this it is necessary to consider this purported essentialism in a little depth, as essentialist conceptions of both subject and object have been seen to be repressive for differing reasons.

The pluralistic themes of post-modernism have led to a questioning of the certainties involved both in the judgement of action in this way and the extent to which identity can be viewed as a rationally chosen and settled concept. This has arrived via a critique of both the traditional liberal humanist idea of the self as a ‘chooser’ in its rational sense and the

² This phrase comes from Tajbakhsh (2001).

dominant strands of structuralism that we have seen defining identity in terms of a reductive, deterministic analysis. Of course this is not a consistent critique, as implied by the doctrines of post-modernism it spans a variety of political perspectives and discipline areas. However, what unites this body of theory is an opposition to the idea of identity as a settled, unified phenomena, whether it is defined in terms of structure or centred on a human-led mode of rationality.

The change in perspective for studies of identity comes from the belief that the twentieth century saw a massive re-evaluation of the enlightenment ideals. In particular the belief in progress and scientific rationalism comes under intense scrutiny in a century where the technologies of advancement appeared to be hi-jacked; from the atomic bomb to prison camps, critics noted the subversion of values and a loss of faith in ideals. Crucially such instances highlighted the problems of universal theories or ‘meta-narratives’ (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). Correspondingly, politics has been seen to diversify, with social movements representing specific concerns beyond the traditional areas of focus for the major political parties and further enhancing the image that it is increasingly difficult to view social groups as anything other than part of the project of identity. By post-modern reasoning, identikit, unified and pre-defined identities are unreasonable constructs for precisely the reason that social groups are likely to include a diverse selection of influences, priorities and psychologies.

Consequently, identity has come to be viewed from an anti-essentialist standpoint from within this perspective, as a concept with few if any unifying features and formed and reformed within discursive practices. This notion of identity as a *temporal* phenomenon reveals an understanding of a concept that is constantly in a state of flux, a product of a moment in time. Any association of identity with an essential core, a ‘true’ value, is held to be unsustainable, as is a search for any universal human values within the subject. In very basic terms, the idea of identity can be seen to have shifted from a focus on human agency or social structure as the site of the production of identity towards an unstable paradigm. In keeping with such subjective concerns, post-structuralism has looked to combat structuralism’s passive conception of the subject, whilst simultaneously developing a

critique of the Cartesian ideal that positions the individual as the sole source of meaning. Again, both ideas are seen to be insufficiently flexible to allow for the multiple subject positions open to individuals and incompatible with post-structuralism's overriding concern with discursive practices. This post-structuralist idea, or cultural critique, is based on the concept of identity being a perpetual process, the subject being constantly 'decentred' within it.

This reassessment has also influenced ideas on individual psychology, with the notion of a settled, centred self receiving some criticism. In the field of social psychology, Lifton (1996), in his account of what he calls 'Protean Man' (named after Proteus, the Greek God who was able to adopt different forms) talks of the inherent tension that he sees in the modern necessity of adopting different 'masks' (p.126). Lifton talks of society promoting an idea of the plural self, that is one that changes 'masks' or subject positions according to the various situations he finds himself in. However, Lifton maintains that this role shifting occurs on a conscious level, the subject being able to "put on or take off" various personas (p.127). Consequently, Lifton sees the subject as "starved of ideas and feelings that can give coherence to his world" and open to feelings of guilt, as there are "no outlet for his loyalties, no symbolic structure for his achievement" (pp.127-8). Here the adoption of multiple positions is a cause of anxiety, the loss of judgement revealing psychological costs. However, post-structuralism has been quick to stress the positive political aspects to the concept of multiple personas and the possibilities it holds for overturning dominant hierarchies.

For introductory purposes I shall initially concentrate on Hall's overview of cultural theory *Who Needs Identity?* (1996). For Hall, identity is a process that exists in the subject's identification (in the psychoanalytic sense) with specific discursive fields. However, it is this process of identification that can be seen to present the first stumbling block for this debate. Hall notes that identity, in general terms, is a product of discourse and points to Foucault's later work in an effort to stress the inadequate conceptualisation of the subject as a part of this process. As I have already shown, in the work of Lifton a conception of the subject's identification with a subject position in post-modern terms is an

extremely negative idea, one that is likely to lead to anxiety or guilt. However, perhaps more importantly, this idea of the subject consciously choosing one subject position for a particular moment in time offers no lead as to why certain positions are adopted rather than others. It was this criticism that led Foucault to reassess his position in relation to the subject as a result of discourse and it is a similar set of factors that led Lifton to state that 'the whole stability/change issue badly needs general psychological revaluation'.

Hall maintains that identification with subject positions differs from the 'commonsense' idea in a number of ways (p.16). Firstly, identification as a process involved with finding a suitable subject position is never completed. It is 'always too much or too little' to fit in totally with a discursively defined role and as such, is constantly renegotiated (p.17). This is because identity is seen in this context to be a concept that is in process across the varying boundaries of discourse, constituting itself by means of what Hall calls 'discursive work', drawing a boundary between its chosen position and that which is excluded (p.17).

Here Hall is referring to the second important point concerning the 'subject in language' approach to identification, namely that the process is (temporarily) completed and subsequently consolidated through a relationship to the excluded pole of identity. For this point Hall draws on the work of Derrida (2000) and, in particular, his work on how language forms subjectivities. Derrida looks at the concept of the 'sign' and concludes that in substituting the representation for the object, meaning is always deferred. The sign is both 'secondary' and 'provisional' and as a representation of both an object and a concept, it is also partial (p.89). Meaning is therefore created by the omissions contained within the sign, specifically the signified concept. Derrida states that 'every concept is inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to the other'; for example, when we think of the concept of 'day' it is in relation to its opposite, 'night' (p.89). This may be true of language, but Derrida also relates this idea to the relationship between language and the subject. He again draws on Saussure's contention that 'the subject is inscribed in language', that we have no other terms to think of ourselves other than within the confines of language, and even when we talk of consciousness it is within subjective terms (p.92-93).

This reference to 'the other' is a central feature of post-structural theory and Hall maintains that it is this relationship that both constitutes an identity and opens the way for politics to enter the field of investigation. He refers to Laclau when documenting how this exclusion is 'an act of power' (p.18), but Žižek (1989) expresses the argument in a more anecdotal and overtly political form.

'In the anti-Semitic vision, the Jew is experienced as the embodiment of negativity- but the 'truth' of anti-Semitism is, of course, that the very identity of our position is structured through a negative relationship to this traumatic figure of the Jew. Without the reference to the Jew who is corroding the social fabric, the social fabric itself would be dissolved....if I lose this 'impossible' point of reference, my very identity dissolves.' (p.176)

So, for a positive identity to be constituted there is necessarily a corresponding negative 'other' against which identity is defined. By this theory the homeless become the 'traumatic figure' suggested by Žižek and this in turn is a continual factor in their exclusion. It is through the functioning of binary oppositions like this that we can continue to define groups as opposed to mainstream society and thus as somehow inferior to it.

However, Derrida's (2000) concept of deconstruction offers an alternative reading of this situation. His idea that 'totalization can be judged impossible' led him to question the extent to which the dominant signifier or opposition can continue to function on the basis of exclusion (p.89). For Derrida the process of closure is 'overdetermined' as the excluded pole acts to destabilise the sign (Hall p.18). Therefore, in terms of identity, meaning is never fully realised as it is constantly undermined by the element that it lacks. It is negotiated in what Derrida referred to as 'play' and certainly cannot be traced back to what we could refer to as its essential fact. This is a central proposition for studies of identity, one that has implications for the relationship between structure and agency. Furthermore, this insight has been developed beyond Derrida's original, rather abstract, focus, to apply

directly to formation of social political identities. In particular, Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Laclau (1990), Dyrberg (1997) and Torfing (1999) have borrowed the concept of overdetermination to re-evaluate the troublesome relationship between subject and object in structuralism and offer a more flexible conception of social relations. This branch of theory will be central to this project and consequently the next section will concentrate on documenting these developments and beginning to speculate how this angle can be useful in the study of homelessness.

Chapter 3- Radical Democratic Theory

In this chapter I am going to develop the summary of identity from the previous chapter and begin to suggest one way in which the problems associated the essentialism of subject or object can be overcome. Chiefly this development will stem from the critique of structuralism by Derrida discussed at the end of the previous chapter. In particular this chapter will focus on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and their development of a branch of theory that was initially labelled 'post-Marxism', but has more recently been christened 'radical democratic theory'. This chapter will begin to highlight the chief advantages for the study of homelessness in applying this perspective.

This chapter will begin by looking at the development of two branches of post-Marxist theory, as an attempt to overcome the essentialism of structure identified in the previous chapter. Following this, the basic tenets of Laclau and Mouffe's theory will be outlined, with particular reference to the concepts of antagonism, overdetermination and the impossibility of society. This positioning of post-structural concepts within political theory will be considered as a way past the structure/agency impasse.

The last three sections will concentrate on the development of radical democratic theory, with particular reference to the later work of Mouffe (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000). Mouffe's work on citizenship and democracy is seen to be relevant to the aims of this project, as whilst it relies on the critique of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), it presents this work within a political context. Mouffe's version of citizenship is also seen to be beneficial to the study of homelessness, as it attempts to address political exclusion through a post-structural critique, whilst appealing to universal aims. Finally the major criticisms of this perspective will be considered and the relevance to this project will be summarised.

Post-Marxism

In this instance and as is generally the case, the use of a label such post-Marxism to describe a diverse body of philosophy and political theory is problematic. In general we can

refer to post-Marxism as an approach that has sought to re-evaluate Marxism in the light of both the theoretical insights of post-modernism and the social and political upheavals that have cast doubt on Marxism as both a feasible and just doctrine for political rule. As Sim (1998) notes, a number of contrasting theorists have been placed within this post-Marxist grouping and whilst there is some commonality in overall themes, there remain several distinct approaches to the place of Marx in post-modern theory. It should be noted that this debate took place within the confines of left-wing theory and so is framed within a certain ideological bias. However, the more recent work of Mouffe (2000) has adapted the earlier post-Marxist framework to include the insights of prominent liberal theorists.

Sim splits this perspective in two, drawing attention to the different roles ascribed to Marxist theory within *post-Marxism* and *post-Marxism*. Firstly, *post-Marxism* can be described as a rebuttal of Marxism; a perspective that ‘can no longer subscribe to the Marxist world view, nor the efficacy of its analytical methods’ (Sim 1998, p.6). Chief proponents of this perspective include Baudrillard (1983) and Lyotard (1988), writers for whom the essentialism of Marxism had become incompatible with their world view. For Lyotard, Marxism was a meta-narrative whose claim to universality had led to the development of exploitation in Stalin’s Russia. Furthermore, Lyotard opposed the universalism of language within Marxism, a universalism that prevented opposition except within the terms of Marxism itself. Lyotard saw the very use of Marxist terminology as a concession to its legitimate status as a universal language. Consequently this *post-Marxism* is post-modern theory first and foremost; condemnatory of the universalism in Marxism that is seen as one-dimensional and untenable.

In contrast to this rejection of Marxism, *post-Marxism* has explicitly committed itself to the renewal of the political left. The central text in this perspective is Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, in which an attempt is made to formulate a non-essentialist version of Marxism; to deconstruct Marx. This is deemed necessary for two interrelated reasons.

Firstly, Laclau and Mouffe share Lyotard’s distaste for the political oppression exhibited by communist states throughout the twentieth century, from the Soviet

suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, to the occupation of Prague in response to Dubcek's attempt to relax the prohibitive stance of Soviet communism. They note the manner in which the perceived 'evident truths' of Marxism 'have been seriously challenged by an avalanche of historical mutations on which those truths were constituted' and conclude that the practical uses of Marxist doctrines demand that the left re-evaluates the basis of socialism (1985, p.1).

Secondly, the failures of Marxism, coupled with theoretical developments questioning the universal goals of modernity, have led to the re-evaluation of the viability of monism. This position shares Lyotard's and Baudrillard's rejection of Marxism as metanarrative which is incapable of providing the necessary flexibility to allow for the contingent nature of social relations. After the fall of Soviet communism in 1989, Laclau (1990) directly attributed the failure of this doctrine to the inadequate accommodation of difference.

'..the rule is clear: the more 'universal' the idea to be embodied is, the greater the distance from the historical limitations of the social agents intended as its bearers will be; and the more likely it is that the result will be a monstrous symbiosis' (p.1).

Indeed, it is possible to see Laclau and Mouffe's work as a critique of totalitarianism that happens to concentrate on Marxist texts. Certainly their stated aim in this project is to re-evaluate the relationship between autonomy and equivalence within hegemonic formations; with the purpose of revealing how such formations repress individual agendas. In this sense, it is the example of the experience of Marxism and Marxist applications in social history that highlight this trend.

Laclau's account of the fall of Soviet communism is inextricably linked to the same flaws that were identified in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). Chiefly, his and Mouffe's opposition to classical Marxism stems from its emphasis on class identity, an emphasis that they see as both unrealistic and unreflective of the varied debates between

Marxist thinkers. Initially they illustrate this by presenting an analysis of the emergence of the concept of hegemony that attempts to show the diverse readings of class identity over the twentieth century. They trace a genealogy that stresses the varied interpretations of class unity in Marxism, beginning with Rosa Luxemburg's account of the differences in strike action in Russia and Germany at the very beginning of the 20th century. From this account, Laclau and Mouffe describe how the extent of class unity was dependent on the political and economic context of the country, proposing that the Russian situation in which strike action became a unified class struggle was a situation due in no small part to the political and economic realities that fostered a sense of class identity. Luxemburg drew attention to the German situation, in which working class struggle was far more fragmented and concentrated on isolated economic disputes between employers and workers. This, Laclau and Mouffe claim, illustrates that class identity in western democracies has not been a unified concept, either in a national or local arena, or even in individual subjects who may experience different loyalties at either a political or economic level. The overall objective of this analysis is to suggest that some Marxist texts have correctly identified that class identity is not an overriding, 'master' identity for the majority of workers in western European countries, but have struggled to fit this into a classical Marxist framework, whereby differences are forgotten and a unified class emerges. Laclau and Mouffe see this attempt to theorise a unified class framework as a fundamentally misguided project and identify the theoretical developments in the 'second international' that justified such an eradication of difference.

Laclau and Mouffe note that whilst Luxemburg identifies the plurality of antagonisms within the German working class, her analysis focuses on areas of commonality between the German and Russian examples and presents the fragmentation of working class interests in Germany as a phenomenon to be overcome. Consequently, the contingency of identity is presented as a social reality which is a mere obstacle to revolution and is only resolved at the spontaneous moment that revolution takes place. This leaves the problem of how so many different interests could be unified in a collective struggle and Laclau and Mouffe identify three significant schools of thought that developed in response to this issue.

Firstly they point to an orthodox perspective embodied by the work of Kautsky, in which the fragmentation of the working class in Germany is acknowledged, but is seen as a trend which will eventually subside, with unification taking its place. Kautsky ascribed a directorial role to intellectuals, but ultimately believed that evolution of capitalism would lead to a united working class. This evolutionary stance is linked to the second perspective; the revisionist ideas characterised by Bernstein. Laclau and Mouffe note that this perspective placed more emphasis on the plurality of identity for individuals, with social agents expected to fulfil the roles of worker, citizen and consumer. In addition, this was seen to have a detrimental effect on class unity. Bernstein also makes a break from the orthodox conception of historical determinism, by allowing for the impact of will on history.

However, whilst the revisionist perspective allows for a slightly more contingent view of social relations, Bernstein still envisages a unification of the working class based on the rational evolution of human history. Consequently, the plurality that Bernstein observes in the social field would gradually be eroded as class identity became the 'master' identity. Laclau and Mouffe summarize this point:

'Thus, although 'the facts' are freed from the essentialist connections which linked them together in the orthodox conception, they are later reunited in a general theory of progress unconnected to any determinable mechanism' (p.34).

Against these two perspectives, the third option is revolutionary syndicalism. This perspective rejects any evolutionary view of history and accepts that a working class revolution is not inevitable. What is required for the unification of the working class is a 'myth' around which activism could be organised. Laclau and Mouffe draw attention to the work of Sorel on this issue, stating that he saw the focal point for class unification as the general strike and it was unimportant whether this action was successful or not. What was seen as vital in the formation of a unified class identity was the existence of a political

opposition against which identities could be constituted. However, whilst this perspective emphasises the contingency of history and the role of representation in constituting identity, it remains unclear why any resultant action would be based around class. Laclau and Mouffe note that the focal point for the constitution of identity could effectively be anything and that in the wake of European syndicalism's failure, many of its former advocates looked for a similar unifying principle in the guise of nationalism.

The central proposition to come from this analysis is that whilst Marxist writers have identified that class identity is fragmented, their analysis has always sought to imagine ways to overcome this. Thus, there is a gap at the heart of this analysis, between the portrait of contingent social relations and the faith that this contingency will be replaced by a constituted, unified identity in the future. This gap is the means of transition between the two states, a process that cannot adequately be resolved in Marxism. In hindsight, history has shown that this gap has been filled by authoritarian measures and the oppression of difference.

It is at this point that Laclau and Mouffe introduce Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as whilst they concede that his work 'does not unfold all of its deconstructive effect on the theoretical terrain of classical Marxism', it is nevertheless seen to be critical in abandoning the idea of 'natural' transition to class unity (p.85). The crucial break made by Gramsci, is to concede that hegemony should span class interests and that this should be conceived by political articulation. Here he is echoing Kausky's earlier assertion that the mediation of intellectuals is required in order to forge unity, as for Gramsci historical change had to be produced; it was not a result of the laws of economics or politics. Thus, this mediation resulting in the unification of identities from a diverse range of backgrounds and positions is properly conceived as a social construction and not merely a helping hand towards an inevitable historical conclusion.

This attempt to re-imagine the concept of hegemony is used to draw a number of conclusions about both the construction of social relations and the nature of identity. Identity is not a result of an essential historical sequence and Laclau and Mouffe consider that the primacy of collective will lends a 'cultural aspect' to the constitution of identity (p.

67). They speculate that Gramsci's conception of ideology gives primacy to 'collective will' over class loyalty, 'as the ideological elements articulated by a hegemonic class do not have a necessary class belonging' (p.67). However, their ultimate rejection of Gramsci's position stems from the idea that whilst hegemony contains a number of elements that may span classes, the ultimate unity in a hegemonic structure has to originate in class belonging. Thus, whilst this conception of ideology introduces the notion of articulation, Laclau and Mouffe note that 'the ultimate core of the hegemonic subject's identity is constituted at a point external to the space it articulates', maintained through an ultimate focus on class (p.85). In terms of identity, this means that the subject/object dualism remains in place, as beneath the contingency that Gramsci grants to both history and social relations lies an ultimate adherence to an essentialist view of class.

They overcome this impasse by adopting an explicitly political version of the post-structuralist critique of identity that was highlighted in the previous chapter. This involves an appreciation of the work of Althusser, but an ultimate dismissal of the essentialist connotation in his work, together with an application of Derrida's critique of totalization. These theories work towards a conception of identity that although based on contingency, is nevertheless defined by the social forces that constitute political identities. The remainder of this chapter will look at the initial formation of these ideas in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and their subsequent development in Laclau and Mouffe's separate work.

One problem has to be addressed before we move on to look at Laclau and Mouffe's approach to identity. Why, following the deconstruction of the major components of Marxism, do Laclau and Mouffe adopt the label 'post-Marxism'? As Sim (1998) notes, Marxism is a doctrine that is universal by its very nature and Laclau and Mouffe's attempt to concentrate on plurality and difference is 'founded on a recognition that cultural change has overtaken the doctrine of classical Marxism' (p.7). Sim concludes that the universality inherent to Marxism makes it incompatible with the type of post-structural theory that Laclau and Mouffe are attempting to introduce and considers that the 'nostalgic' rejection of Marx by Lyotard and Baudrillard offers a more theoretically consistent approach (p.6). These are important criticisms and will be addressed, in turn, below.

Firstly, the incompatibility of universal Marxist goals with the fragmented nature of class structure identified by many Marxist writers is the central concern of Laclau and Mouffe's analysis in the first part of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Here, Laclau and Mouffe appear to concur with Sim's view and state in deconstructing the concept of hegemony and stressing the contingency of social forces, that have been identified, but not adequately addressed by Marxists, they are attempting to highlight a route whereby the mistakes of the past could be avoided. Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe stress that they are attempting to theorise a new type of *politics*, which could be presented from within any number of ideological perspectives. Properly speaking, the Marxism in Laclau and Mouffe's work is an example of how the theoretical perspective that they adopt can be applied, of how the relationship between the universal and the particular, between subject and object, can be reconsidered without granting either category complete authority. In this sense Laclau and Mouffe are testing Marxist texts against developments in theory and attempting to save a conceptualisation of social relations, whilst abandoning the end-game universality that characterises Marxist solutions. Laclau (1990) attempts to clarify this relationship with Marxism:

‘Marx, Kautsky, Otto Bauer or Rosa Luxemburg mean so much more to us if we know ourselves to be different from them, if we can think out the specificity of our situation and our differences when coming to grips with their texts....I have no objection in principle to this kind of operation which would turn Marxism into a floating signifier and thus give way to completely new language games (on the condition, of course, that this operation is recognised for what it is and does not claim to discover the *real* meaning of Marx's work)’ (p.203-204).

Thus, Marxism is not abandoned entirely, but neither are the elements that Sim sees as incompatible with Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical stance retained.

There are also good reasons for rejecting the *post-Marxism* that Sim favours and these are relevant to both the context of this study and the application of *post-Marxism* to political subjects in general. Baudrillard, in particular, is extreme in his rejection of value judgements and belief in the impossibility of political action. Again, Laclau (1990) illustrates the differences between this stance and his own.

‘As to Baudrillard, I do not share the view that moving into a certain post-modernity entails the erosion of all authenticity, and thus produces a ‘social world of repetition and vacancy’. Contrary to the assumption of the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, the decline of the ‘major actors’, such as the working class of classical socialism, has not led to a decrease in social struggles or the predominance of one-dimensional man, but to a proliferation of new antagonisms’ (p.214).

In the context of this study, an acceptance of the extreme relativism proposed by Baudrillard leads inevitably to the type of ‘circular arguments’ identified by Neale (1997). As stated in chapter 1, it is the re-establishment of a political context in theories of identity that offer the possibility of overcoming such problems whilst retaining the focus on difference that Neale found to be beneficial. With this in mind, the next section will focus on an examination of the *post-Marxist* approach to discourse, highlighting the manner in which this approach is useful for the study of identity.

Discourse as ‘Overdetermined’

Laclau and Mouffe’s approach to identity casts a different light on the structure/agency paradigm, in that identity is a concept that is seen to be irreducible to either polarity. As previously stated this involves dispensing with the essential, fixed nature of either subject or object, that characterises both structuralist and rationally chosen identity.

At the heart of this theory is a specific conception of social relations. Laclau and Mouffe insist on the 'impossibility of the social', the idea that social relations cannot be objective. This point is made in reference to Derrida's original idea that totalization is an impossibility, a declaration that Laclau and Mouffe attempt to illustrate through their deconstruction of Marxism. It is in this sense that they abandon any form of essentialism in structure and formulate a theory based on contingency. This has a number of implications for the manner in which identities are formed, as the possibilities of identity are seen to be governed by their relation to the social, but in turn this terrain is limited by the formation of identities. There are a number of different concepts to outline here and I will attempt to summarize them in the following section.

The impossibility of the social refers to the belief that unity, explored through the differential conceptions of class unity in Marxism, is a construction. The notion of objective social relations is linked to this as such a stance is seen to be an imposition that cannot represent the differences that make up the social field. Laclau and Mouffe present the concept of discourse as the site on which social relations are objectified and thus identities are unified. Discursive formations are consequently seen as a site where differences, although not eradicated, are temporarily constituted to produce a totality. In this sense, identities are directed towards subject positions in a manner that we have seen operating in structural theories.

It is important to note that when Laclau and Mouffe refer to the totality of discourse, they are referring to a totality of symbolic relations, rather than an objective unity. In this sense they are following Foucault (1972) in conceiving discourse, not as a collection of related objects, unified by themes or concepts, but rather as a system in which 'dispersion' is the principle of unity 'insofar as it is governed by rules of formation, by the complex conditions of existence of the dispersed statements' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p.105). Such a system may consist of seemingly unrelated objects that may be unified purely by their symbolic membership of a discursive framework.

There are a number of points to come from this hypothesis. Firstly, the formation of discourse involves an imposition of a symbolic unity, or equivalence over difference, an

operation that obviously requires social or political power. However, they are careful to conceptualise power, not purely as a repressive entity, but rather as an 'articulation'. Articulation in this sense is described as 'the creation of something new out of a dispersion of elements', the assimilation of disparate objects into a discourse (Laclau 1990, p.183).

Secondly, this contingency of social relations shows itself in the emergence of antagonism, the very experience that makes articulation necessary. Here Laclau and Mouffe borrow Derrida's (1978) concept of the 'constitutive outside' and contend that the existence of antagonism is the 'constitutive outside' of discursive formation. Such an outside acts as a 'surplus of meaning', difference that cannot be contained within the discursive whole.

Thirdly, Laclau and Mouffe develop the concept of 'overdetermination' to show that although the formation of discourse positions identities in such a way as to disguise the genuine nature of social relations, the nature of discursive identities means that they cannot be fully constituted. Furthermore, discourse itself cannot be entirely fixed, as this would mean it would have existence as a totality and identities would be structurally determined. Discourse itself becomes subject to the same overdetermination identified in the previous chapter, consistently undermined by the elements that it lacks. Laclau and Mouffe refer to this lack as the 'field of discursivity' and propose that discourse is formed in an attempt to dominate this terrain (1985, p.111). As we have seen, the subversion effected by this field acts to destabilise; consequently the meaning and unity of discourse can only be realised partially.

Because discourse is only partially constituted, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that it can only retain its form temporarily. This brings us back to the concept of antagonism, the force that prevents the objectivity of discourse. It is worth dwelling on this concept as it assumes central importance in Laclau and Mouffe's approach to identity formation and separates their approach from other constructivist accounts.

The central thesis of antagonism involves a break from both the idea of contradiction and real opposition. Both categories are seen as totalities, in the first case the totality of concepts and in the second case the real opposition of differentiated physical objects. A physical, real opposition is not seen to be an antagonistic relationship, but

merely the result of an objective clash. Thus any attempt to transpose this relationship to social situations is to consider society as a series of material connections.

‘To apply the same principle to the social terrain would be tantamount to saying that what is antagonistic in class struggle is the physical act by which a policeman hits a worker militant, or the shouts of a group in parliament which prevent a member of the opposing sector from speaking’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, p.123).

Such actions cannot, therefore, be considered to be antagonistic, as clearly it is the meaning behind the actions that is important in this context. However, Laclau and Mouffe also reject the notion of contradiction, where an opposition of concepts represents a site for antagonism. Whilst they concede that real contradictions exist in society, they do not necessarily produce antagonistic relationships. They also point to examples in social history where contradictory belief systems did result in conflict and propose that the reason for the leap between contradiction and conflict is presented as an inevitable reaction, without ever properly being explained. This is the same ‘void’ they identified at the heart of second international Marxism and thus the concept of antagonism becomes the key concept in the formation and re-formation of identities.

The key problem faced by Laclau and Mouffe is that both contradiction and real opposition demand a fully constituted object, which makes the relationship with its opposite comprehensible. However, antagonism is the force that prevents this full constitution and is therefore ‘a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are *shown*’ (p.125, author’s emphasis). This subversion is seen to exist through the prevention of closure in discourse, structured through ‘difference and equivalence’. Difference in this context refers to ‘opening out’ of discourse and the increase of complex relationships, whilst equivalence conversely entails a simplification, a grouping together of differences. Dyrberg (1997) provides an interesting illustration of the principles of equivalence and difference in the construction of Danish national identity by nationalist groups. In this case

a chain of equivalence is created in the 'other' of Danishness; a variety of different ethnic groups are bracketed together in the threat that they pose to the national identity. This opposition is therefore antagonistic, in that both positions are built on negativity, on what they are not. The Danish nationalists perceive ethnic groups as equivalent to each other because they are not Danish, but form their own identity in opposition to this constructed position. However, this negativity means that neither identity can be properly constituted, as both are representations of 'something that is not present', but is presented as essential to the separate identities (p.122).

Thus this conception of antagonism as the force that prevents objectivity is ultimately the nub of Laclau and Mouffe's approach to social relations. It allows them to portray a conception of society in which the formation of discourse and discursive identities are not only linked, but dependent on each other. In this way they apply the post-structuralist ideas identified in the previous chapter into a wider political context and begin to speculate as the social implications of this model. However, the manner in which individuals fit into this theory remains relatively unexplained and so the next section will concentrate on the role of the subject in the work of Laclau and Mouffe.

Identity and 'the Impossibility of Society'

Ultimately this is not a theory that concerns itself with individuals, in terms of speculating as to 'what they are like'. Instead, Laclau and Mouffe concentrate on the possibilities for identity, in terms of mapping the terrain of social relations. Their focus on a non-essentialist conception of discourse, in which structure cannot be fully constituted, leaves the way clear for a model of structure and agency that dispenses with both categories. This section will attempt to conclude this approach, by looking at the implications of this view of society for the concept of identity.

The conception of the subject, the bearer of identity at the heart of Laclau and Mouffe's theory, marks an attempt to move beyond conceptions of identity as either a self-determined or structurally given entity. The subject is enmeshed in the social relations that

govern the limits of discourse and the formation of identity is seen to be both produced by and productive of discourse. Laclau (1990) elaborates on this, stating that 'the constitution of a social identity is act of power and that identity as such is power, a position that implies power itself is a symbolic force that flows between subject and object (p.31). Consequently, this approach to identity formation is impossible to separate from their wider approach to the formation of discourse.

In keeping with this approach, Laclau and Mouffe state that when they are referring to individual subjects, what they are actually describing are discursively formed subject positions. In this sense a subject position is a discursively defined role. However, this does not mean that individuals are reduced to passive effects of ideology, and it is here that Laclau and Mouffe break with Althusser's 'anti-humanism'. In contrast to the criticisms voiced against Althusser in chapter 2, that his adoption of the Lacanian subject was too 'thick' to support his position, they propose that it was his conception of social relations that was at fault. It is the essentialism at the heart of Althusser's view of structure that cannot support the role of the Lacanian subject rather than vice-versa. Consequently, the conception of social relations that Laclau and Mouffe advance attempts to leave a space in discourse. They propose that the individual subject acts as a void, an element that prevents the full constitution of discourse. As we have seen, discourse itself is unable to be fully constituted because of the subverting influence of the elements that it lacks. These elements are identities, which through their antagonistic relationship with each other prevent a closed system of discourse.

The notion of identification is critical in this sense as this is the entry point for the subject into the symbolic order that Laclau and Mouffe propose. The adoption of a position within discourse requires the identification of the individual with a subject position. However, Laclau and Mouffe use the Lacanian notion of the subject; a conception that proposes that the process of identification is based on a fundamental misrecognition. It is this phenomenon that results in adoption of subject positions that cannot 'fit', as they are not adequate representations of individuals. Laclau (1990) expands this point through reference to the process of class identification in the Russian revolution.

‘It is because the bourgeoisie *could not* take up ‘its’ democratic tasks that Russian social democracy felt they had to become those of the working class, etc. It is this act of ‘taking up’ a task from the outside, of completing it and filling the gap which has opened up in the ‘objectivity’ of the structure, that characterises the hegemonic relation’ (p.212).

This brings us back to the point at which we started. Throughout *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe are insistent that this historical moment was context-specific to the economic and political conditions of Russia at this time. Concepts such as hegemony were the product of *perceived* necessity and the identification of so many people with the subject position ‘working class’ was extremely unlikely to happen in a different social context. Yet this crystallises their approach to identity, as the identification with a subject position leaves a surplus, the other things that the subject knows he or she is. Consequently the failure of structure to adequately represent the subject is the very factor that means neither subject, nor object, can be fully constituted, settled concepts.

Radical Democracy

Laclau and Mouffe’s account of the formation of discourse and identity is ultimately concluded by the presentation of their conception of radical democracy. This is the aim of their attempt to re-imagine the concept of hegemony, as they propose a politics based on based on multiplicity of opinion and agenda. In the preface to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* they draw attention to protest movements from diverse and varied groups, a phenomenon that they see as a challenge to the primacy of unified class struggle within classical Marxism. This of course becomes the central motivation for the subsequent deconstruction of Marxism and thus the presentation of a politics that can adequately represent diversity becomes the end-game.

The concept of radical democracy is an attempt to imagine the type of politics that Laclau and Mouffe see emerging from their model of social relations. Their genealogy of Marxist thought attributes the failures of socialism to an inability to account for innumerable agendas and antagonisms within a system based on class allegiance. The emphasis on pluralism is therefore the defining feature of this critique and the focus for the subsequent reconstruction of left orientated politics. In this way they attempt to redefine a number of oppositions, most notably the left's emphasis on equality at the expense of liberty. Liberty in this sense is seen as the site of individual expression and is a notion that Laclau and Mouffe consistently see neglected within Marxist theory. However, this defence of liberty is not a defence of liberal rights. Just as the Marxist tendency towards equivalence is criticised, so the notion of 'natural rights' is seen to produce 'an absolute system of differences' that results in a similar totality (p.182).

Liberty is seen to be eroded by the creation of symbolic equivalence between differential groups; for example the demands of groups representing rough sleepers may be fundamentally opposed to those working with the single homeless in terms of the prioritisation of resources, even though both groups are working towards the eradication of homelessness. Equivalence therefore creates an aggregate identity, in this case that of homeless charities, which cannot represent the diverse needs of its constituent parts. Furthermore, this equivalence has to be accepted as 'common sense' in order to be effective. In this way, Laclau and Mouffe echo Foucault (1994c) in seeing the construction of knowledge around accepted rules and norms as central to the project of establishing a temporary closure based on equivalence.

However, whilst this equivalence of identities is seen to be something that can restrict the autonomy of individual positions, it is also seen to be a necessary requirement in challenging a hegemonic structure. In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe retain the Marxist emphasis on collective struggle by stressing the need for diverse groups to find some form of common ground in order for anti-hegemonic protest to be effective.

‘It is only on this condition that struggles against power become truly democratic, and that the demanding of rights is not carried out on the basis of an individual problematic, but in the context of respect for rights to equality of other subordinated groups’ (1985, p.184).

This relationship between equivalence and autonomy can be illustrated through two contrasting examples, the first being Caryl Churchill’s play *Top Girls* (1991). The play shows the relationship between two sisters, Joyce, a single mother struggling to provide for her child on a low waged job and Marlene, a successful business woman. Debate between the two centres on the division between their respective notions of emancipation, as whilst Joyce represents individualism and speaks of her achievements as an example of the liberating power of a rights based discourse, Marlene consistently reminds her that her niece may not have the necessary attributes to achieve a similar career path. In this case Churchill is considering the relationship between socialism and feminism, arguing that isolated examples of achievement do not directly advance the position of the majority of women. Thus it is the lack of equivalence that is being attacked in this instance; the belief that the equality of women cannot be achieved through a system that accentuates a difference of outcomes.

An example more directly relevant to homelessness was the formation of the Joint Charities Group (JCG), an umbrella organisation for a variety of groups working with the homeless. This group came together following the reduction of the re-housing duty applied to local authorities in the *Local Government Act 1972* and was united against the government’s position on homelessness. However, it was because of a need to retain this equivalence, as well the desire to maintain good relations with government, that a government draft bill was submitted rather than the JCG’s own document. Consequently, the individual agendas present were subordinated to the cause of the group, with the

eventual result being the proposal of a bill that deviated considerably from the JCG's original agenda.³

Both examples illustrate the tension between the equivalence required to challenge a hegemonic position and the autonomy that is required for the expression of individual agenda's. Clearly there is a delicate balance between these two elements and as in the case of Laclau and Mouffe's model of identity formation, the crucial notion in this balance is that of overdetermination. The division between the equality of the left and the liberty of the right is seen to be an opposition that is never resolved and the prospect of dominance by one particular wing is seen to be partial, temporary solution that reflects the destabilised nature of liberal democracy. The emergence of alternative discourses that reveal the overdetermined nature of the hegemonic moment is precisely the moment that antagonisms can result between subordinated identities and more accepted positions.

This phenomenon can be usefully illustrated by reference to the movement for women's suffrage. In this case, it was the notion of universal voting within a democracy that revealed the false equivalence between subject positions. The notion of a citizen possessing certain rights was subverted by the differential position of men and women with regard to the right to vote. This in turn had been supported by certain 'common sense' assumptions surrounding the role of women in society, assumptions that were questioned by both the general campaign for universal suffrage and the specific demand for a vote for women in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was the establishment of an alternative discourse that revealed the overdetermined nature of the patriarchal subordination of women and established an antagonistic relationship. The net result of this relationship, the eventual establishment of equal voting rights in 1928, required a specific re-negotiation of the democratic idea of 'the people'.

Mouffe has clarified the political underpinnings of this position in a more recent work, *The Democratic Paradox* (Mouffe 2000). In this book Mouffe takes the basis of her theory from Schmitt's ideas on liberal democracy; a project that he believed would be destroyed by its internal contradictions. Schmitt sees the concepts of liberalism and

³ For a more detailed account of this instance see page 97.

democracy as fundamentally incompatible due to the democratic need for an exclusive group- 'the people'- as opposed to liberalism's focus on the universal values of humanity. However, whilst Schmitt sees the contradictory versions of equality in liberal and democratic models as ultimately jeopardizing the practice of democracy, Mouffe celebrates this tension. Taking on board Schmitt's observations about the contradictory nature of liberal democracy, she envisages a politics in which the universal rights of liberalism require the constant re-negotiation of notions of inclusion within a democracy.

Thus, the first point concerning radical democracy is that it proposes a re-evaluation of the left's relationship with liberal concepts and institutions. This involves a discussion of the form of liberal democracy, as Laclau and Mouffe maintain that socialism itself is not 'axiomatic' with democracy and it is the apparatus and practices of the democratic state that allow the various protests and struggles that they document to emerge (Laclau 1990, p.124). The liberal-democratic state has to be 'defended and consolidated' rather than overthrown, as it is the divide between equality and liberty that allows the emergence of antagonism (Laclau 1990, p.129). It is the contradictory nature of liberal democracy, the varied emergence of opposition between universalistic and particular ideals that is seen to be the site of the emergence of democratic practice.

Radical Democratic Citizenship

The central idea behind radical democracy, the recognition of varied and diverse struggles for the extension of political inclusion, requires a re-appraisal of individual's roles as citizens. Clearly the thesis that Laclau and Mouffe propose involves an expansion of the number of agendas to be considered in the democratic process. Mouffe (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000) has developed the radical democratic model of citizenship and attempted to clarify the exact relationship of this idea to political concepts and institutions. Consequently, this work provides a framework within which it is possible to see the relevance of concepts such as liberty and equality within a politics based on the impossibility of reconciling difference and equivalence.

The issue of the *extent* of citizenship is central to this project, as Mouffe's aim is to provide a theory of citizenship that stretches beyond a minimal conception of the citizen as a passive bearer of rights and provides a forum through which social and political inclusion can be negotiated. The starting point of this theory is a critique of both liberal and communitarian models of citizenship, centred on the potential of either perspective to allow for a conception of the social agent 'not as a unitary subject, but as an articulation of an ensemble of subject positions' (Mouffe 1993a, p.71). It is the recognition of this view of identity that Mouffe sees as vital in re-inventing citizenship as a more inclusive category.

Concerns over the extent of citizenship and its potential for inclusion are not new. Marshall (1992) questioned whether citizenship effectively upheld class divisions; likewise Marx (1977) expressed scepticism over the concept itself, viewing the promise of equal legal rights as one which divided the public and private self. Such a tactic was seen to focus attention onto the public, legal claim for rights, whilst disguising the existence of a real source of power within the private sphere. However, whilst these criticisms are aimed at the *idea* of citizenship, Mouffe's objections are based on the various models of citizenship that have been debated in recent years.

Laclau and Mouffe's long term project has been to present the theoretical underpinning for 'renewal of the left wing project' and as such it is hardly surprising that Mouffe rejects the liberal conception of citizenship, even though the basis of radical democracy means the retention of liberal institutions (Mouffe 1992b, p.2). Her opposition to liberalism is based on a conception of citizenship that is presented in purely legal terms, as a set of rights that individuals may use in order to further their private interests. This is central to the liberal doctrine; the belief that citizenship should maximise individual liberty through the protection of what are seen as natural rights, generally conceived in a negative manner as freedom from state interference. Therefore the state acts as a protector of rights, allowing individuals to prosper through their own efforts. Waldron (1993) has applied this perspective to construct an argument against the policing of those forced to live their daily lives in public spaces. Waldron reasons that rights have to be situated and by denying rough

sleepers access to public facilities (such as subways or public toilets), policy effectively blocks access to all other rights by denying the space in which to live.

Mouffe takes issue with this perspective, citing communitarian critiques which attribute 'the disintegration of social bonds and the growing phenomenon of anomie' to liberal doctrines (Mouffe 1993b, p.80). This in turn is seen as result of liberalism's failure to provide guidance over the exercise of the rights that it protects, as Mouffe contends that the insistence on the neutrality of the state renders it unable to provide a political identity for its citizens. Equally, the focus on negative rights as freedom from coercion is seen to leave marginalized groups and individuals with few political avenues through which to better their position. With respect to Waldron's argument, such a critique would not take issue with the right to be free from intimidation or arrest in public space. The real problem lies in the extent of the rights bestowed on the individual; namely Waldron's presentation of rights in a purely negative light. Mouffe contends that those marginalized under existing modes of citizenship require more positive rights in order to negotiate their position within the political community.

Conversely, whilst Mouffe takes issue with the liberal conception of a citizenship based exclusively on the protection of individual liberty, she also criticises the communitarian perspective for being too prescriptive. Mouffe's (1992b) objections to the communitarian conception of citizenship chiefly lie in the idea of organising a community around a universal idea of the 'common good'. This she sees as an unsustainable project, as the use of citizenship as a common identity that overrides other associations is likely to suppress the interests and conflicting identities of the many individuals and groups that make up the community. Such an idea runs the risk of oppressing identities in order to adhere to a universal value that may, or may not, lead to the continued subjugation of identities. To relate this idea to the discussion of intentionality and priority need, the original justification for these categories was rooted in an idea of the common good; namely a fear that a universal 'right to housing' would lead to the abuse of homeless policy by those trying 'jump' waiting lists (Richards 1981). As we will see, the implementation of

these concepts can be viewed as exclusionary as those who fall outside of provision have little opportunity to renegotiate their position.

This is central to the radical democratic conception of citizenship; that politics proceeds on the understanding that it is impossible to create a completely harmonious society and in fact, power is necessary in order for society to exist. This point relates back to Laclau's (1990) assertion that 'destroying the hierarchies on which sexual or racial discrimination is based will, at some point, always require the construction of other exclusions for collective identities to be able to emerge' (p.33). The central claim of radical democratic theory therefore places citizenship not as a set of rights bestowed on the individual prior to policy, but as a contested terrain in which individuals can posit their own claims. The tension between universal and particular ideas of citizenship is therefore not resolved, but accepted as the ground on which rights claims are contested.

One prerequisite of this position is the 'opening up' of political discourse, as to cite citizenship as an area of conflict is seen to constitute 'a reinvigoration of the political sphere by making no questions unanswerable' (Rasmussen and Brown 2003, p.176). This focus on inclusion relates back to Mouffe's central aim in formulating a theory of citizenship that offers the opportunity to overcome some of the exclusionary practices that lead to repression of certain social identities. Related to this point is that radical democratic theory locates this struggle not just between the varying interests of citizens, but also within individual's relationship to the political community. The question of identity formation becomes central in this context as Mouffe adheres to a model of identity that stresses a multiplicity of competing associations. Consequently it is not just competing group rights that have to be negotiated, the various associations and priorities of individuals have to be considered too. In this way the political realm becomes constitutive of both the competition between agents and the temporal practice of association that is central to Mouffe's model of identity formation.

If we take these points together we can see a proposed expansion in the terms of citizenship, as well as an extension of the types of activity that constitute political involvement. Rather than being reduced to a neutral set of legal rights, citizenship becomes

a banner under which political and social negotiation takes place in both the public and private sphere. Redefining the boundaries of citizenship in this manner holds considerable potential for the inclusion of marginalized groups, as the borders of the political are expanded to include group based activity. For example, Rasmussen and Brown (2003) have applied this mode of thinking to the situations of those living with HIV and AIDS in Vancouver and hypothesised that events such as memorial exhibitions are implicitly political, as they show the tensions between state funded support groups, grass roots community organisations and families. These events were also educational for the wider community and generated funds for various support organisations, thus fulfilling a wider purpose of promoting awareness and enabling support networks to continue functioning. This application can be furthered to include various projects working with the homeless, particularly those that focus on activities such as music or the arts. Such activities may not be seen as explicitly political, but Mouffe's focus on inclusion and competition shows them as instrumental in defining political agendas, both for the group themselves and the wider community.

Criticisms of Radical Democracy

This chapter has focused on the theoretical framework originally developed within *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, as the critique of the totality of social structures has remained relatively consistent throughout both Laclau and Mouffe's subsequent work. However, whilst the proposition of radical democracy contained within this work sets the agenda for a type of politics based on plurality, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this concept has not been developed in recent years. Indeed at the time of publication this area of their work received substantial criticism within left-orientated journals, primarily because it was felt that Laclau and Mouffe could not adequately state how this hegemony of differential positions could be sustained. Forgacs (1998) summarises this response:

‘Their notion of an open plural democracy depends crucially on maintaining an unstable equilibrium between different social agents without lapsing either into authoritarian centralisation or fragmentation. An attractive idea, but hard to see how it would work’ (p.35).

This in turn relates to a more general critique, in that Laclau and Mouffe are clearly influenced by theories that can be loosely classified as post-structuralist. Consequently they are open to many of the criticisms that have been aimed towards the branches of theory with the ‘post’ affix. The chief accusation levelled against such theories is that whilst they provide an admirable critique of exclusion, the logical conclusion of their position is that *any* judgement in policy is immediately destabilised by that which it excludes and thus open to the same criticisms as the position that it attempts to supplant. In relation to housing, King (2003) has argued against the anti-universalist nature of ‘post’ theories stating that their relativist stance on ethics leaves them without the means to engage in politics, in that the abandonment of universal values leaves the theory with no grounds on which to judge whether one position is better than another. In other words, post-structuralism presents a metaphysical argument that cannot allow for any compromise from its initial position.

These are important criticisms and deserve some consideration. In many ways the two criticisms are interrelated, as the very process of sustaining a hegemonic structure demands a universal point of reference in the same way that ethics require external criteria to be judged against. In terms of Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of radical democracy two related points emerge from these criticisms. Firstly, in what way could any emergence of a hegemonic structure be sustained and accounted for theoretically? Secondly, in the absence of universal ethics, how could it be ensured that any emergence of a unifying principle was indeed ethical?

The problem of sustaining a loose coalition of interests, such as that proposed by the theory of radical democracy, is considered in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Chiefly, this involves the institutionalisation of the tension between equivalence and difference, the

movement beyond institutions as the site of the 'management of the social as positivity' and the recognition that political structures should recognise their constructed and precarious position (p.191). However, this abstract reasoning leaves few clues as to how such a position could be effected and sustained, an omission that led Aronowitz (1998) to bemoan the lack of case studies in Laclau and Mouffe's work. Problematically Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) initial concept of radical democracy supplies a description of the type of political relations that radical democracy should aim to promote, but does not give a concrete example of how this model could be enacted.

However, Mouffe (1992a) has proposed that these ties should be formulated around the idea of citizenship. As we have seen, her version of citizenship demands a re-appraisal of the relationship between the forms of acts that are deemed to be political. In this way she is following the feminist idea that the personal is political, as it is within the realms of the private that discursive norms are legitimised and enacted. However, she does not envisage a politics where this distinction becomes redundant, as to collapse the personal completely into the political is seen as a challenge to liberty. Instead there is a recognition that decisions taken in private have to be acted out in public. It is this 'acting out' that is deemed to be the unifying principle, as it is done by accordance with the 'ethico-political' principles that govern the democracy (p.238).

Mouffe (2000) has advanced this idea of 'ethico-political' principles in order to show how the concept of ethics sits with pluralistic demands of radical democracy. In doing this she distances herself from the post-modernist conception of democracy as an 'endless conversation', as such a position is seen to deny the antagonistic nature of politics (p.129). This in turn results in the assumption that differences can somehow be reconciled or forgotten in a painless manner and a unity can emerge.

For Mouffe this is an unrealistic position. The creation of unity is necessarily exclusive; it leads to the subordination of some identities and the possibility of antagonism. She proposes that the genuine ethical question is not how to formulate a universal formula, as 'the multiplicity of ideas of the good is irreducible', but rather how to deal with the inevitable antagonism that results from temporary points of closure (p.139). In this respect

the idea of ethics that is being advanced does indeed require ‘some limits to pluralism’, as it is the practice of limiting, of forming consensus, that allows antagonism to challenge the legitimacy of these decisions (p.134). Consequently ethics and politics are shown in separate spheres, one consistently testing the legitimacy of the other.

The major criticisms that Laclau and Mouffe have received relate not to their model of social relations or their critique of Marxism, but instead to the alternate that they propose. In many ways the notion of radical democracy is one which cannot provide an alternative, as the necessary conditions for change that they identify are all present in the system of liberal-democracy. Instead, they concentrate on the forms of social relationships that have to be protected and increased; in this way what they are really proposing is an agenda for inclusion, coupled with a defence against authoritarian control. Mouffe’s later work is helpful in this project, as she attempts to provide a concept of citizenship that allows for the development of a political community, whilst recognising the necessary limits that are placed on this community as an absolute totality.

Major Points for the Study of Homelessness

Consequently, the conception of social relations forwarded in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* remains relevant and it is this conception that will be considered in the subsequent analysis of homelessness. Indeed, it is precisely the aims of radical democracy, supported by Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of social relations, which make it such an attractive and potentially useful tool for the analysis of homelessness. Most obviously, the work of Laclau and Mouffe offers a route past the impasse of structure/agency dualism. As seen in chapter 1, this dualism has represented a considerable obstacle to the analysis of homelessness, primarily because explanations rooted in either polarity are seen to offer an over-simplistic reading of the manner in which an individual becomes homeless. Homelessness cannot be reduced purely to a result of either coercive structural power or individual incompetence and any solutions based on either extreme are likely to be unreflective of social relations. In the following chapters, this dualism will be identified as

a central component of homeless policy, an indication of the manner in which previous research has been bound by the terms of official definitions of homelessness.

However, to accept Radical democratic theory it is necessary to accept certain key propositions. Firstly, Laclau and Mouffe present a relational theory in which identities are formed through reference to one another. As this section has shown, subject positions are temporarily constituted in opposition to a discursive 'other', which negatively defines the identity. In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe site the emergence of meaning in a given context, rather than appealing to essential values, or concepts.

The second proposition follows on from this, as if meaning is defined relationally through context, it is therefore unfixed and open to reassessment. In presenting this argument, Laclau and Mouffe accept the post-structuralist position with regard to totalization, in particular the Derridian notion of overdetermination. The idea that privileged positions are undermined by excluded elements is an attractive one for the study of homelessness, due to the possibilities that it presents. Laclau and Mouffe are careful not to underestimate entrenched political power and note that different groups may have to find equivalence with other like-minded groups in order to further their cause, such as in the earlier example of JCG. Consequently, in order to accept radical democratic theory, it is necessary to appreciate the possibility that antagonistic relationships can challenge existing hierarchies.

The third proposition relates specifically to identity. Laclau and Mouffe adhere to a model of identity formation that stresses a diversity of associations for any one individual. Indeed, radical democratic theory proceeded on the understanding that multiple new social movements had made the goal of a class-based hegemony unsustainable. Individuals were likely to have interests beyond their concerns as member of a particular class, and as a result, any theory that failed to account for this multiplicity was likely to suppress individual liberty. In this instance, the issue of equivalence is also important, as whilst such a tactic may mean that some specific agendas are not pursued, this is deemed to be a worthwhile compromise in furthering a general political position. Therefore, in order to accept radical democratic theory, it necessary to accept that individuals have multiple

attachments to different causes, but may compromise on smaller details to pursue a wider, political agenda.

If these conditions are accepted, then radical democratic theory offers an exacting critique of approaches to homelessness. In developing post-structuralist theory Laclau and Mouffe retain the positive aspects of this perspective, as identified by Neale (1997). The identification of meaning structured through binary opposition reveals the manner in which some identities, such as homeless identities, are excluded in relation to a privileged position. Neale's scepticism that post-structuralism, or post-modernism, can adequately address issues of structural power because of their focus on subjectivity is also addressed through the account of the formation of discourse. Chiefly this relates to overdetermination, the manner in which discourse produces truths about a given context through a precarious formation of equivalence. Thus discourse, although operating symbolically, produces a 'real' effect in terms of bracketing together excluded identities against a privileged subject position.

The conception of discourse as a structure destabilised by antagonism offers a view of power that is constructive as well as destructive and this offers the possibility of the re-formulation of discourse based on the affirmation of identities. Perversely, the view of discourse and discursively structured identities as negative (that is not fully constituted) concepts, offers the positive opportunity to restructure discourse through the encouragement of differential identities. The 'voided' individual subject acts to disrupt boundaries and definitions formed by social and political power, a situation that holds profound implications for policy definitions of homelessness. In the following chapters the notion of antagonism as a force that disrupts the balance of hierarchies will be considered in relation to the changing definitions of homelessness, the manner in which the promotion of the interests of an excluded group can act to destabilise the terms of policy.

Equally, the insistence that individuals can identify with a number of different identities reveals the impossibility of reducing a diverse group to a single, excluded identity. This is particularly relevant to homelessness, as a varied range of requirements and circumstances have to be considered in addressing housing need. Mouffe's (1992a, 1992b,

1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000) conception of citizenship allows for multiple associations, negotiated within the twin aims of liberty and equality.

Consequently there are three main concepts that will be applied to examples in homelessness over the following chapters. Firstly, the notion of binary oppositions requiring an absolute judgement will be considered in relation to the conditional nature of homeless policy. The either/or nature of this framework will be seen to offer an un-reflexive policy that excludes individuals and cannot account for any diversity of experience.

This is related to the second concept, concerning the position of normative boundaries, as the dividing line between deserving and undeserving identities will be shown to be overdetermined and therefore constructed according to the political and social conditions of their emergence. Both policy and parliamentary debates will be examined, as evidence of both the changing position of normative boundaries and the ideological influences that have led to their formation. This critique of the act of power required to form a binary definition will be applied in the following chapters with the expressed purpose of revealing the arbitrary distinction between deserving and undeserving identities in reference to historical examples of attitudes to homelessness. This idea will then be taken forward to more recent policy, to highlight the exclusion from the terms of citizenship that results an exclusive framework of this nature.

Thirdly, the concept of antagonism will be used in order to highlight the manner in which assumptions surrounding the homeless have an impact on both the nature of provision and the interpretation of policy. Antagonism will be considered as a force that both destabilises and constitutes identities, both in a positive or negative manner. Therefore stereotypes can be sustained or challenged by antagonism, and this will be seen to contribute to the contested nature of definitions.

These concepts will not necessarily be applied in any particular order, but will be used in order to present a conception of discourse in which meaning is constantly re-negotiated and any objective measure of homelessness can be viewed as unsustainable. The next chapter will begin this analysis by considering the manner in which historical

perceptions of homelessness have belied this view and constructed deserving and undeserving subject positions. Following this initial examination of the historical development of approaches to homelessness, radical democratic theory will then be tested against modern policy.

Chapter 4- Judgement and Homelessness

This chapter will consider one of the major charges levelled against homeless legislation; namely that it promotes and reflects a view of the homeless as a group that can be divided into cases that are either deserving or undeserving of assistance. This accusation is one that has been levelled against many legislative approaches to more general forms of poverty, as well as specifically to homelessness and dates back to the original formation of the Poor Laws. However, several writers have contended that although the deserving/undeserving view of the poor is generally associated with the Victorian era, more recent approaches to policy have retained the judgmental aspects of the New Poor Law system (Jacobs *et al* 1999, Somerville 1999). Consequently, modern homelessness policy has been seen to uphold similar assumptions about the homeless to those that existed two hundred years previously.

This chapter will attempt to develop the implications of this division, considering the discursive conditions of its emergence as a prelude to a discussion of the claim that a conditional approach to homelessness survived in the formation of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*. This act is generally seen as providing the framework for the current legislative approach to homelessness and it developed the three conditional categories that remain the cornerstone of homeless legislation. It was exceptional as the first piece of legislation to be specifically concerned with homeless people and it is undeniable that its passing represented a huge addition to existing provision for the homeless. However, the completed act differed considerably from the proposals for the original private members bill, and it was this discrepancy that has led several writers to question the extent to which the bill was ‘watered down’ in order to pacify opponents of a more comprehensive and therefore costly provision. The particular charge levelled against the act, that in its amended form it upheld the ‘deserving/undeserving’ conception of the poor that had been seen to characterise Victorian approach to poverty, will be examined in this and subsequent chapters.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the construction of identities involves a necessarily excluded position, in this case ‘undeserving’ applicants, which acts to both

affirm and undermine more privileged positions. In the context of this study it is the discursive construction of excluded positions that is of most interest, both in the manner that such positions are maintained and the reasons for excluding one particular group rather than another. The work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Laclau (1990) and Mouffe (2000) shows both the manner in which such exclusions are upheld and the precarious nature of this division. This chapter will apply this thinking to some of the dominant concerns in literature on homelessness and show how a binary nature of structural and agency based explanations of homelessness presents a polarised view of deserving or undeserving individuals in policy.

This chapter will begin by presenting an overview of the deserving/undeserving opposition and consider its relationship with homeless policy. This section will attempt to define this opposition and consider its relationship to the theories of identity documented in previous chapters, highlighting the work of contextually specific discursive formations in maintaining such a separation. Having shown the importance of context in this framework, some historical examples of the different ways in which undeserving individuals have been constructed will be considered. Specifically this section will look at the initial emergence of the deserving/undeserving opposition, as documented in various literatures, examining the different labels that have been attributed to the homeless. This chapter will then conclude and lead into a discussion of the framework of the 1977 Act over the next three chapters.

Deserving/Undeserving Positions in Discourse

Initially it is important to be clear about what this division is and how it fits into the theoretical framework that has been developed above. The ‘deserving/undeserving’ opposition is strongly linked to the structure/agency paradigm that has been discussed in the previous chapters. This association is one that can be attributed to culpability, the extent to which an individual can be judged responsible for their own position. As we have seen this relates to the contrasting influence of structure and agency on the formation of identities, as to consider an individual as a passive victim of social forces is to reduce considerably their own influence on their housing situation, whilst to consider identity as a

self-created phenomenon leaves little room for external influence and can lead to the 'undeserving' label. In the previous chapter I presented an account of social relations and the formation of identity that attempted to question this polarity, the task from here is to test this theory against examples in policy and consider the extent to which legislation acts as a fixing mechanism in homeless discourse.

It is also important to note that the deserving/undeserving opposition can refer to both the technical mechanisms in policy, the manner in which tangible judgements are made against homeless people (for example, Lowe 1997) and the wider discourse that surrounds the homeless and thus influences policy (for example, Liddiard 1999). The deserving/undeserving opposition has therefore been identified in both legalistic accounts of homelessness that examine the actual judgement that has to be made against homeless people and more discursive investigations that look at the influence of general assumptions and stereotypes about the homeless. The importance of this division lies in its effects; namely the exclusion through legislation of a significant proportion of the homeless population from provision. However, it is through the creation of discourse surrounding social issues such as homelessness that policy is justified and the duality is upheld. Therefore, the legalistic and discursive are inter-linked, coming together to form a general discourse around the context. Several studies have attempted to show the explicit links between this and ideological positions of governments; for example Daly (1996) notes that reference to this dualism has invariably produced state responses that attempt to enforce distinctions between deserving and undeserving cases, with an emphasis on the exclusion of the latter. More specifically, Jacobs *et al* (1999) consider the shift from a structuralist position, characterised by the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* and a more minimalist, narrow definition of homelessness contained within *Housing Act 1996*. Crucially, such shifts in policy are considered in relation to both political ideology and the discursive formations that provide a justification for ideological positions. The dominant conception of what constitutes a deserving individual is therefore seen to be instrumental in the eventual writing of legislation and a product of both dominant assumptions about the characteristics of the homeless and an ideological position concerning the proper role of government in providing assistance to individuals. The discursive construction of

undeserving individuals is governed by different factors at different historical moments and within different discursive contexts.

The time-specific nature of assumptions about the homeless immediately suggests a parallel with the work of Foucault (1972), in particular the manner in which knowledge is constructed around a given subject. Foucault's historicized accounts emphasise that phenomenon such as homelessness exist in a material sense, but that meaning is produced within discourse at any given historical moment. Therefore, although the physical condition of being homeless (in its absolute roofless sense, rather than in terms of policy definitions which are bounded by discursively produced knowledge) retains a consistent meaning, knowledge about the homeless is constructed within discourse. Watson (1999) has begun to apply these arguments to the case of women and homelessness, although her work has focused on the manner in which the bodies of female rough sleepers represent a challenge to housed women; 'a reminder to all women of what they might become if they step out of line' (p.96). Watson's use of Foucault therefore takes the form of an exploratory investigation into the politics of representation within social space rather than looking at the changing meanings of homelessness specific to institutions across time.

As stated in the previous chapter, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) concur with Foucault's position on the manner in which knowledge is constructed within discursive formations. In common with Foucault, they see meaning generated within given contexts, although they reject the distinction that he makes between discursive and non-discursive practices. For example, Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) refer to Foucault's conception of institutions as non-discursive, but Laclau and Mouffe maintain that it is inconsistent to retain a model of institutions that discards the possibility that they are affected by the conditions that Foucault identifies in discursive formations. Thus, in Laclau and Mouffe's theory discourse includes both institutions and articulately practices; although variations may be subtle, discourse itself consists of practices from both institutional and wider social settings, specific to given historical contexts.

Consequently Laclau and Mouffe share Foucault's rejection of a linear view of history. However, this emphasis on the discontinuity of discourse across history does not

mean that the division between deserving and undeserving individuals identified in homeless literature is redundant, as to entirely remove this dichotomy welfare policy would have to either apply universally and in a uniform manner, or be disbanded completely. Instead discontinuity implies that the distinction itself is modified through time, with the conception of an undeserving individual changing according to the dominant discursive features of a given historical period. For example, Pleace (2000) identifies a trend for rough sleeping to be connected with deviance, both in the public consciousness and in the Social Exclusion Unit's report on rough sleeping. In the same way Woodbridge (2001) points to the existence of a 'rogue literature' in the Elizabethan period that created an image of the homeless as a highly organised criminal group, which both presented a number of false assumptions about the homeless and helped to justify punitive government measures against vagrancy. Although both of these accounts stress the links between homelessness and deviancy, it would be inaccurate to claim that there is a direct connection between the two, as such position would underestimate the extent to which the definition of homelessness and the nature and threat of deviancy differs between historical periods.

It is therefore necessary to be cautious when considering the extent to which there is a direct lineage between Elizabethan or Victorian attitudes to homelessness and the eventual formation of conditional categories within the 1977 Act; as Lund (1996) notes, our current perceptions of homelessness differ vastly from those present in the 19th century. However, certain themes regarding the construction of undeserving individuals remain consistent and have been identified across different literatures. In this way Foucault (1972) has stated that the unity of discourse emerges not from reference to a fully constituted object, but from 'the rules of formation' of discourse; 'the interplay of the rules that define the transformations of these different objects, their non-identity through time, the break produced in them, the internal discontinuity that suspends their permanence' (p.36). Consequently it is the manner in which undeserving individuals are constructed by different criterion and indeed the belief that it is viable to treat some individuals as undeserving, that is of interest in forming a picture of how discourse excludes certain positions. This may be achieved by reference to different agendas through different discourses or time periods, for example the emphasis on morality in institutions such as the Salvation Army, or on

environmental hygiene in the context of the sanitary reforms of the Victorian era, but it is the emergence of an exclusion based on discursive formations that remains consistent.

The following section will provide an overview of some of these agendas and begin to map the conditional attitudes to homeless provision and the discursive that eventually surfaced in a similar form within the framework of the 1977 Act. In presenting this material, it should be stressed that the aim of this chapter is to present an overview of thematic concerns related to the rules of formation of discourse, rather than a detailed historical account. Clearly an historical overview of any relevance would demand more space than is available in this chapter and as Jacobs (2001) has noted, it is important to be aware of the limitations of research when looking at historical material. Instead, the remainder of this chapter will seek to highlight some major contexts that the deserving/undeserving opposition has been identified in, as well as the formation of assumptions about the homeless that have justified its existence.

This will begin with a consideration of the manner in which the homeless have been presented as a deviant population, both in terms of a threat to social order that demands a directly repressive response and as a justification for reduced provision. Secondly the emergence of a judgement based on morality, primarily in the Victorian era will be considered. Central to this analysis will be the discontinuous nature of discourse in this context, as whilst a moralistic agenda undoubtedly existed at this time, a considerable body of opinion stressed more structural causal factors in the continuation of homelessness. Finally, the move towards a genuinely structural view of homelessness in the 1970's will be highlighted as a prelude to the analysis of the three conditional categories contained in the eventual legislation.

Homelessness, Deviancy and Political Unrest

Even before the advent of a specific homeless policy, the homeless were generally viewed with fear and suspicion. The image of the homeless as a deviant population, a threat to the social order, first provoked legislation that prescribed the surveillance of vagrants in

1383 as a direct response to peasant's revolt of 1381. However, the connection between homelessness and deviance remains to the present day; Pleace (2000), Carlen (1996) and Daly (1996) have all identified a tendency for governments to portray the homeless, particularly rough sleepers, as a deviant population. The sense in which deviance is seen as a justification for the undeserving label varies considerably according to context. Firstly there is some evidence of a directly repressive response to a perceived threat from the unsettled poor in the Elizabethan era. It is in this context that both Beier and Woodbridge (2001) place the Elizabethan attitude to vagrancy and whilst their conclusions differ in several areas, official over-reaction to both scale and nature of vagrancy emerges as a consistent theme.

In order to find a time when the poor, particularly the homeless poor, were not stigmatised in this way, Beier (1985) goes all the way back to the Middle Ages and the Franciscan belief that 'beggars were holy' (p.4). The reasons for the breakdown of this viewpoint are varied, but in general Beier attributes the shift to a more critical view of the homeless to a gradual growth in the scale of poverty. The chronology of historical events would tend to support this position. Firstly, although the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the overall population fluctuate as a result of both the Black Death and various wars, the numbers of people in poverty rose steadily. Secondly, the impact of both disease and political uprising had a considerable effect on the social structure of Britain. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are littered with examples of uprising, by the Scots and the Welsh as well as the aforementioned peasant revolt. The combined effects of these events led to a gradual break up of manorialism and the poor slowly acquired greater freedoms. However, the breaking of manorial ties also brought its own dangers, as whilst the poor could now sell their labour, they were also increasingly open to fluctuations in the economy. It was in this context of enhanced freedoms and growing hardship that the potentially volatile nature of the poor became recognised.

Beier contends that by the sixteenth century the problem of the idle, able bodied poor had become central to officials and the fear of the influence of 'masterless men' demanded coercive action. He documents a number of measures against vagrants, including

the use of martial law and proposals to send the able-bodied poor, including vagrants, overseas to work in the colonies. Transportation became a common theme in the reign of Elizabeth I; significantly vagrants were sent to work for colonial masters in a system that resembled the manorial framework of the Middle Ages (see Beier 1985, pp. 146-170). Beier attributes this harsher legislation to the growth of the number of people in poverty rather than any specific change of attitude, such as a 'protestant ethic' stigmatising the able-bodied poor. Indeed, he analyses official measures against vagrancy in terms of their effectiveness in resolving the problem as it was perceived at the time. Thus, he is able to conclude that policy, although 'inhumane and repressive', succeeded in its aim of containing the threat posed by the mobile poor (p.5).

However Woodbridge (2001), although drawing substantially on Beier's study, presents a more critical view of the Elizabethan period. Woodbridge's work is interesting in this context, as it seeks to explore what she sees as a 'bizarre lack of fit' between contemporary representations of the homeless and historical, statutory records (p.2). In particular, she attempts to investigate why legislation against the homeless appeared to overstate both the demographic scale and potential threat of the vagrant population. In this sense she presents a more interpretive view of the Elizabethan period, questioning the extent to which vagrants were a genuine political force. What is of interest here is manner in which discursive representations of the homeless were formed, as well as the extent to which they influenced both public perceptions of the issue and more importantly, the legislative response of governments. This approach, although 'new historicist' due to its literary focus, shows a considerable debt to Foucault primarily because of its scepticism towards accepted versions of history. Woodbridge claims that 'some of the assumptions about vagrant life long discredited by historians keep cropping up in scholarly writing-even historical writing' and attributes this to a reliance on contemporary literary material in the absence of other forms of historical records (p.6). What is of particular interest to her is the extent to which 'rogue literature', popular novels depicting the homeless as part of a deviant underworld, continues to inform our present day perceptions of homelessness in

this period.⁴ She sees this genre as ‘the tabloids of its day’, fostering a number of characteristics that represented the homeless as morally and politically subversive and more importantly, organized into distinct factions (p.4). This account differs considerably to official documentation detailing the scale and nature of homelessness and Woodbridge explicitly denounces many of the myths that concerned vagrancy in this period. Of particular interest in this section is the extent to which Woodbridge sees an overestimation of the potential for the ‘idle’ poor, especially the un-rooted vagrant population, to become political agitators. Such a conception is viewed as a misrepresentation, particularly as the recognised leaders in major uprisings, for example ‘The Rising in the North of 1569’, were members of the *settled* poor (pp.7-8).

Discursive representations of the homeless in the Elizabethan period would seem therefore to encourage an image of deviancy at odds with reality. In this context the harsh legislative measures to combat homelessness can be seen as a response to the *perceived* threat to moral and social order. Woodbridge qualifies this by stating that it was not so much the immediate threat of vagrants that concerned governments, but rather that they appeared to cause concern across different discourses. Thus vagrants became targets, not because ‘they were the *big* bogeymen, but because they were *everybody’s* bogeymen’ (p.13, my emphasis).

However, whereas the Elizabethan attitude to the homeless can be characterised by a fear of the unruly idle poor, the onset of industrialisation reveals a second strand to the construction the undeserving position, that of morality. This does not mean that criminality of the homeless was not perceived, but merely that view of the undeserving poor shifted focus. Despite this, references to the potential threat of the un-housed poor occurred, such as this reference to the part played by chiffoniers (those who lived by using and selling what they could find amongst refuse) in provoking unrest in Paris:

⁴ Interestingly, Beier notes that this genre of literature was pioneered in Britain by the translation of Sebastian Brandt’s *The Ship of Fools* (1508), the same book that Foucault discusses in *Madness and Civilisation* (1967).

‘They are like all men who live under such circumstances, prone to indulgence in ardent spirits; being degraded and savage, they are ready to throw away their lives on every occasion. There are nearly 2000 chiffoniers alone in Paris and they and the water carriers were conspicuous actors in the revolution of 1830...I believe that were the refuse of houses daily cast into the street in London in the same manner as in Paris, London would soon have as large and as dangerous population of chiffonier class’ (Chadwick 1842, pp.93-95).

In spite of such instances, the industrial era and particularly the Victorians began to focus on deviancy in the form of the immorality of the undeserving poor. Thus, if the homeless became constructed as a threat it was generally to social morals, public sanitation and economic output rather than political structures. The appearance of the New Poor Law announced a second sense in which moral deviance could be used to defend exclusion; the fear that legislation could be manipulated by applicants in order to receive provision ahead of more ‘deserving’ individuals. The following section will consider this change.

Homelessness and the Different Contexts of Morality

As noted above, the undeserving homeless are those deemed to be culpable in their own housing situation. In current legislation they are those who are not considered to be in priority need, or those who are seen to have made themselves homeless intentionally and therefore compromised their claim to assistance. Historically, as we have seen, this exclusion is based on the application of a criterion of eligibility that demands applicants meet certain standards in order to qualify for provision. In turn, this criterion determines eligibility by granting assistance to those who are seen to be homeless through no fault of their own, either because of individual vulnerability or personal circumstance.

Within the literature on homelessness a number of different factors have been identified in explaining exclusion; most frequently the distinction between undeserving and deserving cases has been made on moral grounds. Cowan (1997) supports this point stating

that homeless policy ‘has always required us to oppress the homeless by making moral judgements, not about their housing need, but about why the homeless became homeless in the first place’ (p.21). Moral failing has therefore frequently been identified as a justification for the exclusion of homeless individuals, both from access to provision (as in current policy), or from the rights of citizenship.

Watson and Austerberry (1986) claim that prior to the industrial revolution the homeless were not significantly stigmatised; a contention that assumes that the creation of the deserving/undeserving agenda was Victorian (p26). Other accounts (Somerville 1994, Lowe 1997) also identify the growth of conditional approaches to homeless in this period, particularly with regard to the ‘New Poor Law’ of 1834 and its more punitive approach to poverty than had existed previously. Under this legislation the homeless were one of many groups who were under discussion and Scott claims this policy consciously stigmatised the disadvantaged. Scott (1994) quotes Digby on the politics of selection for the workhouse:

“Those groups whose destitution was seen to be the result of individual moral failing- feckless adults such as the mothers of illegitimate children or vagrants- were given indoor relief in the workhouse. Other groups- widows, the temporarily disabled, the old – were seen as retaining their respectability since their poverty was *not perceived* as avoidable. These groups were not usually relieved in the workhouse.” (p.8, my emphasis.)

The notion of the homeless as individuals in need of moral correction is a common one and frequently associated with the Victorian era. This idea, firmly rooted in individualistic explanations of homelessness, constructs individuals as undeserving for the reason that they have fallen below the moral standards expected of citizens. This individualistic conception maintains that individuals who fallen below this moral standard cannot reasonably expect assistance.

However, it is far from clear that this judgement of morality was an exclusively Victorian creation. Lowe (1997) qualifies the focus on the Victorian construction of deserving/undeserving opposition stating that the 'old' Poor Law system was in no way generous, but the majority of homeless literature focuses on a period which began with amended Poor Law of 1834. Both Biere (1985) and Woodbridge (2001) refer to the perceived immorality of Vagrants in the 17th and 18th centuries; the 'tabloid-style fantasies' concerning the immoral habits of the homeless (Woodbridge 2001, p.9). What distinguished the Victorian era from previous historical periods was the advent of the New Poor Law and the institutionalisation of existing attitudes regarding the undeserving poor. This coupled with punitive principle of 'less eligibility' lead Isin and Wood (1999) to note that 'the Poor Laws and Factory Acts demonstrated that one could rely on the state's protection only when one abandoned one's civil and political rights' (p.27). Thus, the perception that some individuals were undeserving of assistance because of their social or moral failing contributed to their loss of citizenship rights through the enactment of state policy.

In this context it is the idea of a moral citizen that becomes central. Evidently we are not dealing with a clearly defined notion of morality, but rather one that was informed by a number of different discourses. Thus homeless literature contains references to the morality of cramped housing conditions, the political menace of the homeless and the threat to urban hygiene by the housed and un-housed poor throughout the sanitary reforms of the 19th century. Morality in this sense is a construct that appears in a variety of different contexts and it should be noted that undeserving, 'immoral' individuals were likely to be constructed in a variety of different ways.

One of the ways that this division was enforced, both in terms of discursive formations and legislative impact, was through the campaigns for sanitary reform that dominated approaches to urban living in the 19th century. These campaigns, characterised by the work of reformers such as Chadwick and Kay-Shuttleworth, were based on an overwhelming desire to rid urban areas of conditions likely to lead to epidemics and recount the living conditions that allowed disease to prosper. In this context the issue of

preventing epidemics was seen as inextricably linked to ensuring sanitary living conditions for the poor, both in terms of the dwellings themselves and the cleanliness of the streets that surrounded them. However, whilst the object of reform was ostensibly the environmental conditions of urban areas, much of the literature that documents the living conditions of the poor contains distinctly moral overtones.

One such example of this is Chadwick's *Sanitary Report* (1842). In this document a separate section is reserved for the residences of those who 'traverse the country from one end to the other, and spread physical pestilence, as well as moral deprivation' (Chadwick, 1842, p.358). Whilst the majority of the report focuses on the effect of environment on behaviour and presents a case for reform based on improving living conditions for the poor, the homeless are considered in a separate section entitled *Common Lodging Houses*. This was not originally part of the enquiry, but Chadwick was persuaded as to its relevance by the possibility of disease being spread through the community by the transient population.

The conditions in such establishments were the subject of official scrutiny throughout the 19th century and in many cases considerable concern was expressed for the moral well-being of inhabitants. For example:

'We find it stated in Mr Burgess's return, that in 47 of these (lodging houses) the sexes indiscriminately sleep together. In the daytime the doors of these houses are generally thronged with dirty, half dressed women and children; and if visited in an evening, the inmates are found to be eating, drinking and smoking.' (Chadwick 1842, p.357)

Watson and Austerberry (1986) contend that 'it was women who were constantly mentioned in discussions of these 'dens of vice' and quote Mayhew (1851) to support their case. However, whilst homeless women were disproportionately highlighted in reports detailing immoral conditions within lodging houses, Chadwick's report details a disdain for the morality of residents of lodging houses in general. In this case it was not only the sexual

behaviour of the homeless that raised concerns, but also the perceived idleness reported by many of Chadwick's medical officers. It is in this context that the issue of vagrancy and the 'idle' poor again becomes central and Chadwick presented the residents of lodging houses as receiving fraudulent medical assistance and dodging the workhouse by inventing fictitious professions. In Chadwick's report these are the uncontrollable elements of society and their very presence threatens to disrupt the program that he was attempting to introduce.

'The greater number of these persons shelter themselves from apprehension and punishment under the Vagrant Act, by professing to be match sellers. This is made a cloak for begging alms, and the pretext for going from house to house, and pilfering as the opportunity offers' (p.364)

What is interesting about this document is the split between the main body of the report, which is generally sympathetic to the material causes of poverty, and the section reserved for common lodging houses. Indeed, Hamlin (1998) notes that Chadwick faced considerable opposition from many in government precisely because his general views on the impact of living conditions on poverty were felt to be contrary to the agenda of the New Poor Law.

The Poor Law was intended to automatically deflect potential claimants of relief back to the labour market to accept the prevailing wage...The presence of any destitution was an embarrassment; it showed that the balance had not been found, that the terror of the workhouse was too successful' (p.90).

Therefore Chadwick's views were treated with caution because they were not felt to highlight individual causal factors enough. Chadwick's focus on the impact of sanitation on

the living and working conditions of poor was seen to undermine the Poor Law system and propose that poverty was something other than a result of individual failing.

This focus makes it all the more surprising that Chadwick abandons this perspective only for the section on common lodging houses. In this sense the report presents a 'violent hierarchy' of the most overt type, as whilst the housed, working poor are presented as deserving of better conditions, those residing in common lodging houses are depicted as idle, immoral and a threat to the sanitary conditions surrounding their temporary home. Primarily, the housed working poor are presented as deserving because of their importance to industry; Chadwick frequently presents the benefits of sanitary reform in stark, economic terms. Conversely, the case presented for the reform of lodging houses can be seen to invert the overall thematic concerns of the Sanitary Report. Far from documenting the effects of environment on behaviour, Chadwick was effectively spelling out the effects of the behaviour of those in lodging houses on the environment of the labouring population. The lack of morals and the unsanitary practices that emanate from lodging houses are portrayed as unhealthy influences on the wider community and the individuals responsible are seen to be undeserving of the little assistance granted to them.

The legislative impact of this act differed according to this division. The sanitary measures that made up the bulk of the report were in part implemented by the *Public Health Act 1848*, which went some way towards ensuring a clean water supply and sewage system (Finer 1952). In contrast, Chadwick's solution to the perceived problem of common lodging houses consisted of a licensing scheme, requiring regular inspections of the establishment and this measure was eventually adopted by Lord Shaftbury's *Common Lodging Houses Acts 1851* and *1853*. Consequently, this example illustrates a discursive influence on a more intrusive policy aimed specifically towards the un-housed, and more importantly, unemployed poor.

Whilst this example shows a direct, repressive enforcement of deserving/undeserving opposition against the homeless, Watson and Austerberry (1986) document the effect of policy on social attitudes and the opposition that the official stance provoked. Watson and Austerberry are specifically concerned with the position of single,

homeless women in the Victorian era and the manner in which dominant attitudes as to the role of women in the home served to marginalize those without housing, or indeed family. In one such example they consider the extent to which the Poor Law system of 'less eligibility' coupled with the wretched conditions within casual wards, led many woman to seek alternative forms of income through begging or prostitution. A situation is described in which economic hardship led to stigmatisation; single women were treated with suspicion and could often only find accommodation in the worst common lodging houses, due in part to many landlords reluctance to take in poor, single women.

Watson and Austerberry's focus is on the position of homeless women, but many of the trends towards an exclusion of the homeless on moral grounds can apply to Victorian homelessness in general. This analysis is also interesting because of its focus on resistance to what they see as the 'blame-orientated and moralistic approach which was rife at the time' (p.41). In contrast to the majority of accounts of homelessness in the 19th century, which tend to focus on the punitive measures contained in the New Poor Law, they document a considerable opposition to legislation that appeared to stigmatise the homeless, particularly homeless women. In particular, they consider organisations that began to recognise structural causes of homelessness and campaign for increased provision for women.

One such example was the frequently criticised Salvation Army. This organisation is often cited in accounts of homelessness as an example of the moralistic stance adopted by the Victorians, primarily because the emphasis placed on religion and the moral 'reform' of the individual (Neale 1997, p.53). Their charitable provision of accommodation is generally portrayed as a strict regime, conditional on the behaviour of residents. Orwell (1989) provides perhaps the most famous account of the accommodation, albeit from the 1920's:

"At seven another whistle blew, and the officers went round shaking those who did not get up at once. Since then I have slept in a number of Salvation Army shelters, and found that, though the different houses vary a little, this semi-military discipline

is the same in all of them...The fact is that the Salvation Army are so in the habit of thinking themselves a charitable body that they cannot even run a lodging-house without making it stink of charity” (p.159).

Watson and Austerberry accept the moral hierarchy at the centre of this charge, but point to the influence of General Booth in the formation of the Salvation Army’s policy. His emphasis on the moral was tempered by the early admission of structural causes in the roots of homelessness and a belief that material conditions played an important part in homelessness, as well as more behavioural aspects (for a full account see Watson and Austerberry pp.35-7).

Such examples illustrate that certain groups refused to recognise dominant attitudes towards the homeless and that several organisations sought to assist the homeless through both the provision of accommodation and repeal of repressive legislation. This is not to underestimate the considerable difficulties faced by the homeless in the Victorian era, or to underplay the extent to which the Poor Law system treated the un-housed poor as undeserving because of their perceived immorality. However, Watson and Austerberry’s focus on the opposition to both dominant attitudes and government legislation demonstrates the ‘overdetermined’ nature of discourse, as it was the presence of this opposition that precluded the possibility of unified discourse concerning the morality of the homeless and led to the development of, in Laclau and Mouffe’s terms, antagonistic relationships between legislators and reforming groups. To refer back to Watson and Austerberry’s earlier example of homeless women working as prostitutes, it was the intervention of a considerable body of opposition that eventually led to the repeal of the *Contagious Diseases Acts 1864, 1866 and 1869*. This legislation required women working as prostitutes to register with the police and undergo regular medical examinations. Watson and Austerberry note that in practice this reduced the chances of women finding alternative employment, as once a woman had been registered it became difficult ‘to have her name removed unless she left the area or married’ (p.34). Opposition to this legislation stressed both the structural reasons behind the decision to work in this area, as well as the

stigmatising effect that registration had on the choices available to individual women. Thus it was the antagonistic relationship between campaigners, who met over 900 times between 1870 and 1885, and officials that forced the eventual repeal of this legislation and renegotiated the opposition between deserving and undeserving individuals in this area.

It is therefore difficult to trace an absolute thematic consistency to the notion of morality in the deserving/undeserving opposition. Where there is some continuity is in the notion of conditionality itself and more importantly, in the tangible exclusion of undeserving individuals. Foucault's notion of discourse as a discontinuous system unified by 'rules of formation' applies neatly to this construction of undeserving individuals in the varied contexts of morality and demonstrate that whilst an object of discourse is re-constructed constantly, it is the overall framework that consistently produces new exclusions. In the next chapter I will develop this framework to look at the beginnings of homeless legislation, specifically the formation of the priority need category.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to provide a theoretical and contextual overview of the development of deserving/undeserving conceptions of the homeless poor. Initially Foucault's (1972) notion of discourse as discontinuous system in which normative boundaries change across time was seen to be helpful in this task, whilst his conception of 'rules of formation' which states that whilst the content of discourse may change, the overall framework remains the same, was seen to fit in with Laclau and Mouffe's focus on the permeable, but not destructible, boundaries of exclusion. This notion was considered to be useful in documenting the different constructions of undeserving positions.

To illustrate this, two examples were provided. The focus on the deviancy of vagrants in Elizabethan England was seen to be an example of the formation of a differentiated and feared 'other', this formation provoking a coercive response in legislation. Secondly, the focus on the perceived immorality of the poor in the Victorian era was seen to inform a variety of repressive responses, from the New Poor Law, to the

differentiated attitude to the homeless within the sanitary campaigns. However, the contested nature of exclusionary boundaries was illustrated through reference to a number of movements that sought to advance the position of the homeless in a directly antagonistic relationship with legislators.

The common element to these examples regards the theme of conditionality, the manner in which assistance to the homeless was only granted if the individual fulfilled certain criteria. This provides a 'rule of formation' for this discourse, as whilst normative boundaries have been seen to change across time, this overall framework has remained intact. Thus whilst there have been different conceptions of an individual who is deserving of assistance, what has remained consistent is the exclusion of those who are deemed to be unworthy.

This theme of conditionality will be seen to continue into more modern legislation and will be discussed more fully over the next three chapters. Chapter 5 will begin this analysis by examining the initial emergence of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* and the manner in which this conditional framework came to form the bedrock of homeless policy. In particular this framework will be analysed with relation to the category of priority need and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) critique of binary oppositions will be applied.

Chapter 5- Priority Need

The *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* was the first piece of legislation aimed specifically at re-housing homeless people and its framework remains the basis for policy in the present day. As such its achievements are numerous; it provided an official stamp to the growing belief that homelessness was not simply a result of individual pathology, it placed a duty on local authorities to re-house those deemed to be homeless and it effectively created a 'right' to housing for those accepted as homeless.

However, it can also be claimed that the Act created homelessness as the social phenomenon that we know today. This initially seems a harsh judgement for a piece of legislation that undoubtedly benefited many of the recipients of the provision granted under its terms. After all, prior to 1977 many homeless families were still being housed in lodgings that were used as workhouse accommodation under the New Poor Law and a re-housing duty only occurred in situations of absolute emergency (Glastonbury, 1971). The 1977 Act changed this by its introduction of an obligation placed on local authorities to re-house the homeless. However, as this duty was not to be universal, the central question became 'who are the homeless?'

In response a system of measurement was created; a way of deciding who should receive assistance. This is one of the central points surrounding this legislation, as defining who was actually homeless was determined by assessing which groups should be re-housed. The 'right' to housing existed only for the statutory homeless and thus the act of defining this group assumed central importance. It is in this sense that the act constructed homelessness as the social phenomenon that we can recognise today, not because the definition has remained entirely consistent across time, but because the act introduced a system for determining who was eligible for inclusion within the terms of the definition itself. As we have seen this was achieved through the formation of three 'tests' of eligibility, namely priority need, intentionality and local connection.

The next three chapters will examine these categories in turn and investigate the extent to which Laclau and Mouffe's focus on the antagonistic relationship inherent to

binary oppositions undermines the legitimacy of the definition of homelessness that these tests construct. These chapters will attempt to place the concept of a 'conditional' approach to homelessness within the theoretical framework outlined in chapters 2 and 3, showing how homeless identities are constructed differently across time and location. Central to this analysis will be the proposition that statutory homelessness cannot be considered to be an objective measure of housing need, that the category of homelessness forms subject positions whose legitimacy is undermined by the nature of their exclusion.

This chapter will begin by looking at the debates surrounding the adoptions of a statutory definition of homelessness; analysis will then move on to look specifically at priority need. This category will first be defined and the reasons behind its initial inception in the 1977 act will be considered. The politics of the division demanded by the category of priority need will then be considered in relation to the exclusion inherent to binary oppositions. The analysis will then move to the notion of overdetermination, applied to both the changes to priority need categories since the 1977 act and the recent challenges by the Scottish parliament to the category itself.

The Right to Housing

Whilst the preceding chapter demonstrates that structural influences on homelessness were identified in the Victorian era, it was only in the late 1960's that the campaign to introduce legislation to recognise homelessness as housing not a welfare issue began to gather real momentum. This campaign led to the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*, the first legislation in this area and the framework for current policy.

The *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* was introduced to update the conditions of the *National Assistance Act 1948*. In turn, this legislation abolished the provision of the New Poor Law, but focused on those made homeless through emergencies.⁵ Consequently,

⁵ Richards (1981) claims that in practice, many local authorities enforced a provision that retained some of the de-humanising traits of the workhouse. She writes that 'Communal facilities, segregation according to sex and restricted contact between husband and wife were the norm' and also highlights that many of the former workhouses were being used as hostel accommodation. (p.15).

the individualistic agenda that characterised Victorian responses remained to some extent, an indication that homelessness was seen as an issue that would be remedied by the completion of post-war housing programmes and most residual cases would be properly handled by welfare departments. Provision for the remainder of cases would be judged by the agenda of 'less eligibility', a residual measure from the New Poor Law.

It has been well documented that the profile of homeless issues was elevated considerably during the mid-to late 1960's and the campaign for a statutory duty to re-house the homeless has its roots in this period (Richards 1981, Jacobs *et al.* 1999). Thompson (1988) points to a number of studies that document the rise in the number of homeless applications received by local authorities and the gradual recognition of homeless issues was furthered by the television adaptation of Jeremy Sandford's play *Cathy Come Home*, following its initial screening in 1966. Sandford had been a consistent commentator on the conditions faced by the homeless throughout the decade and existing research has focused on the importance of his work in raising both public awareness and the political profile of homelessness.

Richards (1981) presents a comprehensive account of both the public concern provoked by this programme and the political response that followed. In particular, she draws attention to the launch of Shelter, the National Campaign for the Homeless; a mere two weeks after the screening (p.27-28). This was orchestrated to capitalise on the publicity generated by *Cathy Come Home* and Shelter became central in the campaign to consider homelessness as an issue attributable to a shortage of housing rather than a product of individual choices. This structural focus became integral in the attempts to introduce legislation recognising that victims of emergencies were not the only group with legitimate claims for housing assistance (Jacobs *et al.*, 1999).

The *Local Government Act 1972* reduced the limited re-housing duty contained within the *National Assistance Act 1948* to a discretionary power; a move that provoked the formation of the Joint Charities Group (JCG) in 1973. Supportive of the findings from the various working parties, this group pressurised the government into including a review of

homeless procedures in a 1973 white paper, a proposal that finally found its way into government circular 18/74.

The 18/74 circular became a forerunner for the 1977 Act and drew heavily on Grieve's (1971) contention that homeless strategies should concentrate on providing 'homes' rather than the settling for temporary, stop-gap solutions. Most notably, the re-housing function was seen as a task best performed by housing departments, with applicants selected according to a fledgling list of 'priority need' categories. This list represented a more inclusive definition of those entitled to accommodation than that in the 1948 Act. Furthermore, the punitive practices allowed by the terms of the 1948 Act (such as splitting families according to rules of segregated accommodation) were condemned, as was the use of temporary, hotel-type accommodation as anything other than a last resort (Richards 1981).

The Joint Charities Group gained an assurance from both major parties that the prospect of homelessness legislation would be considered following the general election of 1974. Their proposals centred on translating the provisions of circular 18/74 into legislation, placing a statutory responsibility on local authorities for re-housing those adjudged to be homeless. In addition to this, the JCG's approach to definition revealed an inclusive stance that incorporated the 'single' homeless into the priority need grouping.⁶ Fundamentally, their position represented a belief that the homeless had a 'right to housing' and that it was properly the role of the state to provide for this.

However, the Labour party were reluctant to place any further demands on government resources and parliamentary time. Prior to the IMF loan of 1976 the economy was extremely stretched following the trade union disputes of the early 1970's, coupled with a developing world-wide recession (Sked and Cook 1993). The decade saw the development of various 'overload' theories (Beer 1975, King 1975) whereby the wisdom of 'big' government came under scrutiny in the wake of the huge subsidies for nationalised industries and welfare payments that led to a large balance of payment deficit in the macro

⁶ In policy terms, the grouping 'single homeless' is quite misleading. In the eventual act, the single homeless included families with children over 16 and couples with no children. Effectively, this grouping referred to those who fall outside of the priority need categories.

economy. Consequently although it would be inaccurate to suggest that the Wilson and Callaghan administrations adhered to the doctrine proposed by this body of opinion, the government had a vested interest in controlling welfare spending and policies that demanded an increased expenditure were likely to be greeted with a degree of caution. Certainly, as debates progressed a number of MP's from both sides of the house expressed concern over the possibility that homeless legislation may be used by those looking to 'jump' council waiting lists or avoid taking responsibility for rent arrears.

In addition to this, local authorities retained an opposition to a statutory responsibility to re-house the homeless throughout the consultation period, although they agreed with the objectives of the proposed legislation. Chiefly, their opposition could be attributed to a desire to retain autonomy in prioritising local need; a practice that would be undermined by a law that would dictate their housing policy. However, Richards (1981) notes that local authorities were suspicious of the agenda proposed by the JCG and refused to enter into talks with them as a result of previous disputes over local government practice.

In the event, a consultation paper was published in 1975 that stated that the government was 'not persuaded that the present is necessarily the time to introduce a major change in legislation' (DOE, 1975 quoted in Richards 1981, p.43). Consequently, although the JCG worked to gain the support of a number of MP's, the priorities of the government coupled with a new Secretary of State for the Environment, led to the draft bill being omitted from the 1976/7 Queen's Speech. This omission resulted in a sustained period of public pressure from the JCG, centred on the pre-election promises they received from the Labour party. The government were forced into accepting a private members bill by the public and political reaction afforded to their omission. Steven Ross, a Liberal MP was chosen to promote this bill, which was now in the happy position of receiving cross-party support, at least in principle.

The debates and pressure that came out of the consultation period were crucial in the eventual content of the legislation. For example, the JCG proposed the DOE drafted bill rather than their own document, as it was felt that the government's own draft had a better chance of becoming legislation. This represented something of compromise, particularly

with regard to the groups that would be accepted as homeless, as the government's initial definition of homelessness was far tighter than that proposed by the JCG. The parliamentary progress of the bill represented a continuation of this agenda, with a significant number of opposition MP's proposing amendments based on unease over the potential for a 'scroungers charter'. By the time of the third reading there were also real concerns over the future of the bill; particularly when the government's seemingly disinterested stance was considered. Consequently, the JCG had to adapt their original plans as the definitions were tightened and a disparate group of interests had to be appeased.

The impact of these changes will now be examined, both in terms of the original agenda of the bill and the version that finally appeared on the statute books. In particular, the next section will examine one of the key concepts introduced through the various readings of the bill, namely priority need, and assess the extent to which the original objectives of the JCG were realised. Finally, the extent to which the conditional categories contained within the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* represent a continuation of the deserving/undeserving conception of homelessness will be analysed.

The Emergence of Priority Need

The idea of priority need is the cornerstone of homeless policy, setting up a hierarchy through which administrators can judge the relative merits of applications. As highlighted above, the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* arrived at this concept after a lengthy period of negotiation; eventually settling on a list of groups in a move that saw the JCG compromise their original position. This section will examine the politics of the separation effected by the formation of a priority need list; the extent to which the creation of such a hierarchy serves to construct privileged identities, as well as the extent to which these subject positions serve as sustainable representation of housing need.

The purpose of this analysis is not to dismiss the concept of priority need unnecessarily. There are many justifiable reasons for the existence of the category, not least

the need to discriminate between cases in order to allocate scant resources. In this sense priority need can be seen as a practical measure, a way of ensuring that limited housing resources can be allocated in the fairest way possible, rather than a mechanism whose sole purpose is to deter unwarranted applications.

The concept of priority need is one that can also be seen as necessary for humanitarian reasons. Few would disagree that for individuals in certain situations or with certain characteristics, immediate assistance in finding housing is imperative. However, in prioritising the needs of some groups over others, a number of groups remain effectively outside the terms of this definition. In the case of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*, Thompson (1988) draws attention to the plight of those deemed to have ‘intentionally’ made themselves homeless and single homeless people; those who have respectively been excluded from provision and found themselves outside local authority responsibility. The nature of intentionality will be examined later, but this section will concentrate on the politics of the concept of priority need in reference to those who are excluded by its terms.

This highlights a second point concerning priority need; namely that it is not an isolated gateway to provision. An applicant who is deemed to be in priority need may still be refused access to permanent housing as a result of an intentionality ruling, or because of insufficient ties to the local area. For example, the Welsh assembly’s report on the implementation of the 2001 priority need order found that although certain individuals were considered to be in priority need under the new legislation, local authorities did not necessarily accept all applicants as homeless.⁷ A typical example of this concerned a man leaving the armed services, who would therefore be considered to be priority need. However, when it became apparent that he had been discharged from army for failing a drugs test, he was ruled to be ‘intentionally’ homeless and therefore ineligible for full provision (WAG 2004, p.31). It is in this sense that priority need should be seen as a ‘hurdle’ rather than a ‘gateway’, as simply falling into one of its categories does not invalidate other tests of eligibility.

⁷ *The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001* will be considered in more depth on page 109.

Following these points it becomes clear that a discussion of priority need is not definitive in assessing the extent to which definitions of homelessness are inclusive. Nevertheless as the first test of eligibility it demands further consideration as a useful and accurate indicator of need, particularly in terms of the relationship between the manner in which subject positions are created and the effects of their construction. Initially the priority need 'list' was not written into the bill and there were fears throughout the negotiations that such categorisation could work against borderline applicants.⁸ The final list stated that victims of emergencies, those with dependent children and pregnant women and their partners should all be considered as having an immediate requirement for re-housing and that local authorities had a duty towards individuals in these situations. In this light the priority need list offers the most overt indicator of privileged subject positions by virtue of the list itself; an explicit statement of the groups deemed to be deserving of local authority assistance.

As we have seen, the constitution of identity is based on opposition. Laclau (1990) points to the exclusion that is at the heart of this situation, the negative 'other' that is necessary for an identity to be formed. Consequently, we can view the boundaries of priority need in this manner; the implication being that the need of priority groups establishes what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) term a 'violent hierarchy', a relationship whereby the need of one group justifies the exclusion of another. Torfing (1999) illustrates this point by citing the example of apartheid-era South Africa, where the exclusion of the black community 'helped to unify and sustain the identity of both Afrikaners and English as a white people' (p.132). In relating these terms to the position of single homeless, the position of the single homeless is constituted below priority groups in a hierarchy of need; this opposition being sustained by the perceived need of priority groups.

This is a relatively simple proposition and if we concentrate on the 'marked' pole of identity, the single homeless, then it becomes apparent that formation of priority need within the 1977 Act effectively depends on this either/or opposition. However, when we consider that the single homeless fall entirely outside of provision, that there is no

⁸ In the draft bill the Secretary of State had the power to denote priority need groups, which were written in the code of guidance (Richards 1981).

responsibility placed on local authorities beyond a requirement to provide advice and assistance on a discretionary basis, then we begin to see the true nature of this exclusion. For those who are not considered to be in priority need, the original terms of the 1977 Act dictated that the local authority could provide ‘advice and such assistance as they consider appropriate in the circumstances’, a measure that effectively freed local authorities from a duty to those not deemed to be in priority need (DOE 1977, Section 4 (2)). In part this exclusion was justified on the grounds of the material; local authorities have finite stock and staff time and consequently those in the greatest need should be housed without fail. Nevertheless, the chief opposition to the bill was not that some applicants will not be housed, but rather that some applicants will be housed *when they are undeserving of assistance*. In particular, there were concerns over the proposed legislation becoming ‘a charter for the queue-jumper’ and definitions were tightened to protect those waiting to receive housing from the local authorities (Jessel quoted in Richards 1981, p.63). In other words, the first point that can be made about priority need is that the category itself was partially justified on the grounds that it was believed to be necessary to exclude those applicants who were felt to be unworthy of assistance in finding housing.

This assumes that the opposition between accepted and rejected positions is a genuine one, a real contradiction. As we have seen in chapter 3, Laclau and Mouffe reject the possibility of real opposition and contradiction, not because contradictory relationships between physical objects or concepts do not exist in reality, but because these types of relationship assume an opposition between a fully constituted identity and its ‘other’. The presence of such a relationship would negate the possibility of transformation, as the privileged position would become an objective reality. Thus, the point concerning Laclau and Mouffe’s approach to categorisation is that the imperfect ‘fit’ of social and political identities, the impossibility of a fully constituted social object or its other, effectively demands that the content of identities is open to constant re-appraisal. Laclau and Mouffe’s work on discursive formations is therefore useful in this context as it attempts to destabilise the relationship between the poles of identity. In this branch of theory although an identity is defined by its opposite, it is also destabilised by what it lacks. The opposition inherent in any given position is that which simultaneously characterizes it as distinctive and also

prevents it from being a fully constituted identity. The dichotomy between the two poles of identity is therefore not a genuine, essential fact, but a contingent relationship between two mutually dependent opposites.

If we apply this idea back to binary concept of priority need we see a reduced justification for the absolute judgement required by the category. The logical endpoint of this concept is one that ‘prevents society from constituting an objective, rational and fully intelligible reality’ by effectively undermining the notion of absolute categorisation (Torfing 1999, p.44). Such oppositions as the priority need/single homeless dichotomy are seen to be unsustainable because neither position is fully constituted and thus, each effectively undermines the other’s legitimacy. The attempt to ‘fix’ meaning in policy by introducing a binary opposition is consequently seen as a reductionist strategy that cannot fully represent the contingent nature of social relations. The nature of this split can be illustrated by reference to the practical exclusion demanded by priority need. In this sense we need to examine the feasibility of a policy that can exclude in such a seemingly arbitrary manner as the age of a family’s children. In the hypothetical case of two families one of whom has a child of sixteen or older, is there a real distinction in terms of their relative need? Is it realistic to assume that one family has a complete dependence on the local authority, whilst the other does not? There are any number of other examples of those who fall into the category of single homeless that could be highlighted, the central consideration being the ‘cut-off’ that occurs as a result of this categorisation.

Consequently the initial conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis concerns the nature of the critique, rather than the prescription of future policy. Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of an open-ended structure presents a challenge to the idea of priority need by undermining the idea of fixed, justifiable oppositions. The dividing line that separates prioritised groups from the single homeless is shown to be a construction that artificially divides cases into categories whose effects cannot adequately reflect the complexity of circumstance. However, in legislative terms, this division is straddled by the concept of ‘vulnerability’ and it is important to note that the criterion for inclusion is to some extent determined within the local area. The next section will examine the implications of such

discretionary exemptions and begin to suggest how this fits into the theoretical framework that is being developed.

Vulnerability and the Expansion of Priority Need

Whilst the analysis above highlights a binary division between deserving and undeserving cases created by the category of priority need, it would be inaccurate to suggest that priority need is implemented in a consistent and objective manner. This opposition, although common in its effects, can be variously influenced by any number of factors, from available supply of housing to the case history of individual applicants. In part this inconsistency is a result of legislative measures to accommodate both ‘borderline’ applications and to allow local authorities to retain control over their housing stock. In this respect the 1977 Act contained some scope for discretion on the part of local authorities by its use of the term ‘vulnerability’. The wording of section 2 (1) (c) stated that any person may be entitled to assistance if they are ‘vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or physical disability or other special reason’ (DOE 1977). It was initially hoped that this would provide local authorities with the necessary leeway to provide for borderline priority cases, but in practice the judgement of ‘vulnerability’ has proved to be problematic for local authorities and homeless officers alike.

The criterion for the judgement of vulnerability itself has not been contained in legislation; the working definition has arisen through case law. In the debates surrounding the *Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002*, concerns were expressed surrounding the unwritten nature of this definition.

‘I return to the vulnerability test. It seems tendentious and highly subjective, and it will be difficult to achieve conformity. The only example that I can give is that given in the explanatory notes—in the paragraph on page 2 that deals with article 6:

‘In deciding whether a person is vulnerable, a local housing authority must decide whether a person is less able to fend for himself than an ordinary homeless person

so that injury or detriment would result where a less vulnerable applicant would be able to cope without harmful effect.’ (HOC Debates, column 10)

The judgement of vulnerability is therefore, strictly speaking, a relative one. This working definition suggests that such a judgement should be made using an ‘ordinary’ homeless person as a benchmark. Of course the judgement of what constitutes an ordinary homeless person is likely to differ over geographical areas, as well as between individual homeless officers. Moreover, the subjective nature of this assessment means that it is possible for individual prejudices or local economic or social environments to influence the judgement of whether an individual applicant is vulnerable.

The *Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002* marked a considerable expansion of the Priority Need grouping. This followed the original pledge in the 2000 green paper to extend these categories, particularly in relation to those who have an institutional background or are escaping violence. For these groups the test of vulnerability applies and thus the acceptance of individuals remains dependent on the discretion of local authorities. In addition to the aforementioned groups, 16 and 17 year olds would now be considered to be in ‘automatic’ priority need, as proposed in the 2000 green paper. The one change to the 2000 proposal was the inclusion of those aged 18 to 21 who were in care as a child, a group that would be automatically considered to be in priority need, as opposed to those over the age of 21 who would be considered on the basis of their ‘vulnerability’. The key changes to the category of priority need are outlined in Fig 5.1.

The most obvious aspect to these changes is the expansion to the groups considered to be in priority need, a move that was broadly welcomed by groups working with the homeless. However, as shown in Fig 5.1, the majority of the new groups were not be considered to be in automatic priority need, but were to be assessed according to their individual vulnerability. In terms of the theoretical framework that is being developed, the concept of vulnerability highlights the variable criterion for inclusion or exclusion and the

Fig 5.1; New Priory Need Categories

	Prior to 2002	New 2002 Categories (England)	New 2001 Categories (Wales)
Automatic Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Pregnant▪ Have dependent children▪ Homeless as a result of a disaster (eg. fire or flood)	<p>As prior to 2002, but with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 16 and 17 year olds▪ Young people under 21, who were fostered between the ages of 16-18 and are no longer fostered or accommodated by the LA	<p>As prior to 2002, but with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 16 and 17 years old▪ Care leaver, or person at particular risk of financial or sexual exploitation, aged 18,19 or 20▪ Fleeing domestic violence or threats of violence
Determined by Vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap, physical disability or other special reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Fleeing domestic violence or threats of violence▪ Persons who have reached the age of 21 and are considered vulnerable because of being fostered or accommodated in care▪ Homeless after leaving the armed services▪ Homeless after leaving police custody or having served custodial sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Homeless after leaving the armed services▪ Former prisoner released from custody⁹

⁹ Whilst this group receives priority need automatically in Wales, a test of local connection still applies.

increased use of this test following the Priority Need Order 2002 clearly shows its continued relevance to the legislative approach to homelessness. Clearly the important factor in this division remains the point of exclusion, the location at which a subject position provides a constructed, 'fixed' identity. In terms of the analysis above, the crucial point emerges in the discrepancy between objective and subjective measures of homelessness. As we have seen through the initial analysis of priority need, the construction of a 'hierarchy of need' based on binary oppositions demands that subject positions become a representation of a real opposition. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) refute the claim that social identities can ever be in fully constituted opposition, as such a relationship demands two fixed, stable extremes; a reliable 'other' for each position to be defined against.

Initially I presented the claim that priority need categories create subject positions that categorise homeless identities as either privileged or excluded. Both positions correspond to a local authority duty to re-house in the former case and dispense advice in the latter case. The initial analysis of this situation drew the conclusion that such a categorisation was likely to exclude many applicants who would be considered to be in housing need, but for a particular characteristic that disqualified them from full provision. In theoretical terms, the fix that creates privileged identities also constructs a dividing line, a division that is likely to exclude many applicants whose social reality ostensibly differs very little from those accepted as in priority need.

The consideration of vulnerability alters this framework only slightly. In many ways, the vague definition of vulnerability would appear to suit Laclau and Mouffe's concern with the subjective, a variable, possibly localised definition seems more in keeping with their objections to a totalised view of social relations. However, the subjective nature of vulnerability does not negate the division at the heart of priority need. It is the content of judgement required by vulnerability that is variable. In this sense the absolute judgement remains, whilst the criterion for determining inclusion/exclusion may differ between local authorities. The concept of a real opposition is still intact and although a test of vulnerability may be operated on a subjective basis the model of social relations that it

represents is still an objectified one. The extended priority need listings in England therefore retain the same framework as previous legislation, particularly as the majority of the new categories demand a test of vulnerability.

The *Homeless Act 2002* does attempt to take the ‘edge’ off the separation between priority and non-priority cases by increasing the provision for individuals deemed not to be in priority need. This was an attempt to soften the divide between inclusion and exclusion; a measure that granted local authorities the power to secure accommodation for those not deemed to be priority cases. As noted above, the local authority’s previous duty to the non-priority homeless only extended as far as giving advice and assistance as was considered appropriate to the circumstances, but in a proposed amendment this discretionary provision was increased to a duty. The debates surrounding the original *Homes Bill* cast doubt as to the practical effect of the first measure, as in effect it was felt that the lack of available housing in high-demand areas would mean that this power would be rarely used (SCD, 30th January 2001 cc 337-41).

Despite these changes the basic exclusionary framework of the priority/non priority division remains in English legislation. However, it is worth comparing the *Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001* with its English counterpart, as although the Welsh order retains the discursive ‘rules of formation’ inherent to homeless legislation, it presented a considerably more inclusive priority need list (Foucault 1972, p.42). Ostensibly the list is very similar to the English equivalent, but the key difference lies in the omission of the ‘vulnerability’ clause. Those with institutional backgrounds or fleeing violence are accepted as homeless automatically and are thus entitled to full provision, unless they are found to be intentionally homeless. As highlighted earlier, this does not mean that provision is automatically granted to those in priority need groups, but a review of the implementation of homeless legislation found that the percentage of presentations resulting in acceptances went up from 33% in 2000 to 38% in 2001 (WAG 2004, p.15).

Clearly, the expansion of priority need in Wales has had an effect on the number of applicants accepted as homeless and it would be inaccurate to suggest that this has not resulted in some problems for Welsh local authorities. Primarily these have been of a

practical nature, particularly with regard a shortage of housing stock. Local authorities also noted that a longer period of adjustment prior to the order, as well as ring fenced funding to assist with the greater caseload, would have been beneficial. To some extent these difficulties are to be expected and the experience of the Welsh may well assist the Scottish in the implementation of their proposed changes to the priority need category.¹⁰ In this respect, the Welsh example illustrates the value of planning and permitting local authorities to update their own budgets in order to allow for changes to the law.

However, whilst some of the problems of implementation have been attributed to insufficient planning, the commission's report also highlighted struggles of a more ideological nature. Generally, these amounted to clashes of interests regarding the location of the homeless, both with regard to placement of projects working with those with support needs and more relevantly, the re-housing of some individuals who fall into the new priority need categories. Concerns were voiced regarding potential tension between initiatives for community regeneration and safety, and the need to re-house from a variety of different backgrounds, in particular the report notes the unpopularity of the homeless with 'communities, the media, or elected members' (WAG, 2004, p.22). In this sense the omission of the concept of vulnerability from the Welsh priority need test does not appear to have created a uniform response to homeless applications, although it has clearly removed a layer of subjective judgement. What becomes apparent through the creation of newly privileged identities is the *irreducibility* of antagonistic relationships, in this case between those wishing to re-house the homeless and those professing a concern for the safety or reputation of the local community. The antagonism stems from a conflict of interest concerning the 'deserving' nature of some homeless applicants, for example former prisoners released from custody; a group whose re-housing has a tradition of provoking tension within a local area (for example, Cowan and Gilroy, 1999). The privileged nature of such subject positions can therefore be considered to be overdetermined, in that the re-housing of certain groups within a local area is likely to present a challenge to both allocations policy of the local authority and the very nature of a policy that provides

¹⁰ See page 111 for details of the Scottish proposals

support for those not deemed to be worthy of provision by the popular consciousness. In the case of antagonistic relationships such as these, the ‘intentionality’ category often provides local authorities with the necessary leeway to exclude individuals who may be received with hostility or fear by the community at large.¹¹

The Welsh example illustrates that whilst the ‘opening up’ of priority need can lead to an increased acceptance rate (albeit an increase of only 5% between 2000 and 2001), the multi-layered nature of homeless legislation allows local authorities a considerable amount of autonomy in determining the extent of their provision. Indeed, one of the key features of the report is the continued variability in provision, both in terms of acceptances and assistance to those not deemed to be in priority need (WAG, 2004, p.23). Such examples demonstrate that even absolute local authority duties may be met with an inconsistent efficiency across geographical areas. Ultimately however, it is the binary divide at the heart of priority need, its twofold response to a multitude of circumstances that remains the central concern of analysis and the root cause of exclusion from provision. The erratic nature of administration only alters this situation insofar as the ‘split’ between privileged and excluded identities occurs at different points; the division itself being the major concern for the construction of identities that can represent housing need. The next section will examine the response of the Scottish parliament to this dichotomy and assess the impact of these proposals on the theoretical framework proposed thus far.

The Scottish Example

The *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* marks a significant moment in homeless legislation, primarily because it alters the conditional framework that has been identified as the guiding principle of homeless law. The act has attracted considerable support from groups working with the homeless and following the approval of the bill, the Scottish parliament was awarded the ‘Housing Rights Protector Award’ by the Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions. In general terms the Act presents a revision of the approach to

¹¹ The nature of antagonism, with specific reference to intentionality will be examined in greater detail in chapter 6.

intentionality, a suspension of the need for applicants to prove a local connection and commitment to end priority need tests by 2012. In the context of this chapter it is the last of these proposals that holds the most relevance, particularly as advocates of the bill presented a critique of priority need that was powerful enough to sustain such legislation.

In comparison to the legislation discussed throughout this chapter, the proposals concerning priority need for Scotland are remarkably straightforward. The Act sets out an expanded priority need list, again focused by a test of vulnerability, but with the expressed purpose of gradually widening this definition. The legislation sets out a loose time framework to allow local authorities to prepare fully for an increased caseload and a more specific schedule has to be announced before 31st December 2005. In this sense it is hoped that some of problems identified by the Welsh assembly can be avoided and that the legislation will act to make new accommodation and services available. This schedule is open to amendment, but the overall commitment to remove the priority need test remains the objective of legislation.

In the context of this chapter the justification for the removal of priority need that was presented to the Scottish parliament assumes some importance. The legislation itself represented the enactment of proposals contained within the final report of the Homeless Task Force, a group whose membership comprised representatives from a variety of different backgrounds. Primarily their justification centred on the claims of those excluded by existing priority need categories, this corresponding to the stated aim of expanding legal rights for the homeless. For example, the contribution of Margaret Curran MSP:

‘Just as the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 raised the minimum rights for homeless people so that all were entitled to at least temporary accommodation and advice and assistance, the bill progresses further the rights of people who find themselves homeless.... Those changes will not be rushed or undertaken lightly and they will happen with full consultation over the coming months and years. If the changes are to succeed, partnership working with local authorities and other landlords will be essential. However, the changes will enable a shift of emphasis away from the

barriers between a homeless person and a home and towards facilitating solutions.’ (SPOR, 5th March 2003, col. 19029).

However, the debates surrounding the bill saw some opposition based on the increased resources that the bill’s provision will demand and in particular, the lack of a costing framework. For example, the comments of Lyndsay McIntosh MSP:

‘I support the bill's aims but, without the proper financial backing, local authorities will not meet the high expectations of the bill. That is a bit like free personal care—we have the high expectation and then all the dither and delay about whether the policy will be achieved, yet the issue still remains a problem for some people.’ (SPOR, 5th March 2003, col. 19034).

The removal of priority need from the statute books is clearly dependent on the ability of local authorities to fulfil their increased duties, but the emergent nature of the legislation demands that priority need is phased out in consultation with local authorities. It is this loose framework that precludes the possibility of accurate forecasting, a situation that led Ms McIntosh to advise Conservatives to abstain from supporting the bill.

A second point follows on from this, in that the abolition of priority need leaves no criterion by which to judge the allocation of scant resources. When assessing the theoretical impact of this measure it is worth remembering Laclau’s (1990) contention that ‘destroying the hierarchies on which sexual or racial discrimination is based will, at some point, always require the construction of other exclusions for collective identities to be able to emerge’ (p.33). Social identities are therefore considered to be *competitive*, as to present a more harmonious relationship removes the concept of antagonism. Without this conflict, identities remain uncontested and therefore stable, a clear affront to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) rejection of totalisation. There is a fundamental issue of the relative merit of applications here, an issue highlighted by Ian Robertson.

‘If a woman is fleeing violence with a couple of kids, and she has clearly been abused, most people would recognise that as a number 1 priority. How can that be done if 10 or 15 people are present at one time and nobody has any priority? In operational terms, the people who apply tend to be prioritised.’(*Official Report, Social Justice Committee*, 13 November 2002, col. 3269-70).

In this light it is possible to see challenges to the proposed inclusive stance of the Scottish parliament. Whilst the removal of priority need tests would undoubtedly grant applicants similar rights, it would also invert the relationship between privileged and subordinated positions. Therefore a new totalised view of provision emerges, one in which an essentialised view of structure cannot allow for the diverse experiences of homelessness. This is clearly a problem of relativism, in that without an external criterion, each case can be seen to be as urgent as another. In this case Laclau’s point is critical; a hierarchy of need is required, if not as a means to judge inclusion within housing, then as criterion to determine who is housed first.

This also means that local authorities would eventually have a considerable portion of their discretionary power over acceptance removed; a situation that could well lead to delays in the expansion of priority need. Another Conservative member of the executive, Murray Tosh, noted this potential in debates and whilst it did not diminish his support for the bill, he stated that the bill demanded a leap of faith in that ‘if the bill is passed, the consequence will be that the Executive must provide the resources’ (col. 19039). It will be interesting therefore, to see the pace of changes to the priority need groupings in Scotland. The Scottish Council for the Single Homeless (2002) demanded that whilst the changes to legislation may present challenges for local authorities, the ‘abolition should not be held up by the speed of the slowest’ (p.2). In practice however, it remains to be seen whether local authorities are able to maintain the pace of change demanded by the legislation.

The *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* represents a brave attempt to address the problem of exclusion through priority need by aiming to place all applicants on an equal footing. However, without a corresponding increase in provision the necessity to judge between cases remains as a mechanism to ensure that those in the greatest need are rehoused as quickly as possible.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the major issues involved in the judgement of priority need. Beginning with an overview of the formation of the 1977 Act, this chapter noted a gradual tightening of definitions, enforced by a critique that focused on the possibility of legislation being abused. This was followed by an examination of the issues specific to priority need, primarily the manner in which the category divides applicants into deserving and undeserving cases. Crucially this division acts to exclude the undeserving, a situation that was seen to create a violent hierarchy. Using Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) critique of binary oppositions, this section attempted to highlight the exclusionary nature of this judgement. The concept of vulnerability was seen to 'soften' the divide between the two poles of identity and allow for some diversity of experience, but ultimately the excluded, undeserving pole was seen to undermine privileged positions. Finally, the abolition of priority need in Scotland was considered. The aim of overcoming exclusion was supported, but some reservations were expressed regarding the allocation of resources, should insufficient stock be available after 2012.

In the next chapter I will develop this analysis by considering the way in which this conditional framework is supported by the category of intentionality. This will involve a discussion of the manner in which a specific undeserving identity, that of the intentionally homeless individual, has been created. In particular, the notion of antagonism will be used in order to show how subject positions are created and sustained, and how this construction acts in conjunction with the conditional framework identified in this chapter in order to exclude individuals from citizenship rights.

Chapter 6- Intentionality

The test of intentionality is perhaps the most controversial measure of homelessness. It is the most obvious governmental protection against fraudulent claims for assistance, as it seeks to test the motives of an individual in leaving their last place of residence. The contentious nature of this assessment stems from the perceived moral judgement that local authorities are required to make of homeless applicants, a measure that leads Cowan (1997) to suggest that the measurement of housing need is replaced by a judgement 'about *why* the homeless become homeless in the first place' (p.21).

The nature of intentionality therefore makes it an overt example of a conditional approach driven by a moralistic criterion. In this sense it is possible to challenge the claim made on behalf of the 1977 Act, that 'homelessness was, at last, officially recognised as a housing problem' (Neale 1997, p.50). This chapter will attempt to assess the extent to which the category of intentionality undermines the structuralist position, by examining the nature of such a judgement in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) work on discourse and antagonism. The central claim of this section relates to the idea that the presence of a ruling concerning the intention of an applicant enforces a judgement of an individual's behaviour, a judgement that may have little to do with the assessment of housing need. In this sense the category of intentionality constructs undeserving identities by reference to a code that is based on the culpability of the individual and cannot fully account for the influence of social forces.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the continued existence of this category is justified purely as a deterrent to those seeking to jump housing waiting lists. This chapter will also attempt to demonstrate that whilst this was the key motivation in the initial formation of the concept of intentionality, a more current approach concerns the particular needs of those applicants who repeatedly become homeless. In particular, the needs of those individuals who repeatedly become homeless are seen to be better addressed through a targeted approach, rather than through blanket acceptances.

Nevertheless, intentionality is at its root an exclusionary measure and this chapter will attempt to evaluate the nature of this judgement. Beginning with a definition of intentionality and a brief look at the circumstances surrounding its initial formation, this chapter will then focus on the theoretical implications of a judgement of this nature. Finally, the changes to provision for applicants deemed to be intentionally homeless in Scotland will be examined.

Defining Intentionality

In the previous chapter, the category of priority need was examined with reference to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) contention that identities are formed negatively, temporarily constituted by the exclusion of an 'other', but whilst this account of the discursive formation of identity highlights that negation is a central component of open-ended structures, it offers few clues as to the context in which this might occur. To examine this set of issues, Laclau and Mouffe introduce a discussion of the politics involved in constructing a violent hierarchy and the function that this serves in maintaining hegemony. What is of particular interest in this discussion is the manner in which discursive limits are constructed. It is this 'framing' that allows certain positions to be constituted as outside the differential system of discourse. As we have already seen, this distinction involves an inevitable judgement, a judgement that is necessarily ideological in its nature.

To relate this idea to the concept of intentionality we first have to provide a definition of the term. The text of the 1977 Act states that an individual is deemed to have become homeless intentionally if 'he deliberately does or fails to do anything in consequence of which he ceases to occupy accommodation which is available for his occupation and which it would have been reasonable for him to continue to occupy' (DOE 1977 s. 17 (1)). Certain qualifications are made to this definition, including provision for an 'act or omission in good faith' that leads the applicant to become homeless (s.17 (3)). Equally, discretionary powers give local authorities the possibility of judging what accommodation is 'reasonable' for an individual to inhabit; the wording of section 17 (4) gives a clear implication that this judgement is a relative one, made against the quality and

availability of other local authority stock. The conditions of this test have been retained by subsequent housing acts.

Unsurprisingly, this idea is one that was included in the bill after the initial draft. In fact it resulted from a concession to the 'anti-bill' wing of the standing committee, the faction that was in favour of legislation based on emergency provision for victims of accidents. There was considerable debate over the possibility of homeless legislation being abused, a position that led to W. R. Rees-Davies calling the bill 'a charter for scroungers and scrimshankers' (HOC Debates, Vol 926, col. 905). This led to a number of amendments to the draft bill, most of which were aimed towards ensuring that the legislation could not be used to jump existing housing waiting lists.

In practical terms, the thinking behind the intentionality clause was that there were a significant number of potential applicants who would effectively make themselves homeless through their failure to pay rent. Richards (1981) draws attention to the discrepancy between this line of reasoning and official homeless statistics of the time, stating that only 7% of homeless cases in the preceding year were attributable to rent arrears (p.69). Despite this, there remained a general agreement through the various readings of the bill that it was desirable to penalise those whose situation was seen to be a result of their own decision making.

As with the case of priority need, the real concerns over this category have arisen over the 'all or nothing' nature of provision and the level of subjective judgement required by local authorities in assessing need. If we consider the binary nature of choices inherent in the first point, a similar line of critique emerges to the case of priority need. In this instance it is the opposed position of identities that is open to question, the idea that intention alone is all that separates one case from another. As with priority need, the destabilised nature of identity leads to a questioning of the possibility of drawing a line between applicants in this manner.

The second point follows on from this position, in that if categorisation occurs, is the judgement of an individual's intention an effective criterion by which to assess need? It is evident from both the concept itself and the debates that led to its inclusion in the bill,

that intentionality was originally conceived as a punitive measure, a safety valve to both deter unscrupulous applicants and reassure those on housing waiting lists. Again we can question whether the two positions constructed by the judgement of intentionality represent a genuine contradiction, but to further this analysis we need to consider the theoretical function that this attempt to 'fix' one pole of identity as a normalised position performs. In particular we need to consider the function and motives behind the symbolic force that operates to construct one position as a worthy, deserving identity.

Through the debates that led to the tightening of definitions in the bill it is easy to see the concerns of the politicians and local authority representatives, who wanted to ensure that any legislation would not offer a 'back door' route into housing. From the local authorities perspective there was a practical concern over workload and the subsequent effect on budgets. However, whilst these were also concerns for the politicians on the standing committee, the wording of their objections to a more universal definition of homelessness suggests a strong ideological element. Much of the discourse on this matter highlights the differing interpretation of the state's function in determining the proper role of individuals and the role of policy in protecting this code.

Consequently it is possible to see an adversarial position being developed, between those seeking to establish a more universal 'right to housing' and those whose primary concern lay in the protection of the state from unnecessary claims for housing assistance. Equally, a conditional criterion such as intentionality effectively produces an exclusionary barrier between those accepted as homeless and those deemed to be culpable in their own situation; a dichotomy that is driven by a political perception of responsibility. It is in this sense that the relationship between the deserving and the intentionally homeless can be seen to be a direct opposition, an adversarial position. As we have seen, it is at the location of this conflict that Laclau and Mouffe site the dislocation of identities; the friction that leads to the reformation of privileged identities. The following sections will therefore examine the politics of intentionality by considering the concept of antagonism and the extent to which deserving identities are constituted through temporary ideological identification.

Antagonism and Intentionality

Following the discussion of the role of binary oppositions in identity formation, highlighted in the previous chapter with reference to priority need, the next stage of Laclau and Mouffe's argument introduces the concept of social antagonism; one which refers to the oppositions that result from the implementation of a political agenda. Antagonism stems from the exclusion of identities and the construction of those identities as an impediment or threat to the wider society. Perhaps the most succinct definition of antagonism is to see it as the force that prevents an identity becoming fully constituted in relation to its discursive 'other'. It is thus the force that can either 'dislocate' discursive formations or provide a temporary stability for a given identity, the force that leads to every identity's overdetermination (Torfing 1999, p.131).

A discussion of the antagonistic forces that suppress excluded identities can highlight the role that these play in constituting an accepted, normalised position. In this relationship, it is important to note that social antagonism is not inevitably the cause of the exclusion of an identity, this exclusion may result from any number of factors that are not considered by policy. It is this collection of factors that Laclau (1990) refers to as the 'constitutive outside', an extra-discursive set of influences that may have little to do with the environment in question, in this case the judgement of homelessness against what we can loosely described as a moral criterion (p.9). The consideration of the 'outside' calls into question a number of issues that may include macro-economic factors or personal histories, circumstances that are not necessarily considered to be adequate justification for homelessness

Nevertheless, it is precisely this 'outside' that intentionality judges. For example, it may be the choice to spend money on things other than rent, other demands that may or may not be deemed to be absolutely imperative, that can be considered in the assessment of intentionality. Consequently it follows that there is a necessary dislocation between the accepted and excluded poles of identity in this context. This is because the 'outside', the causal factors that are external to discourse are directly attributable to individuals under the

terms of intentionality. External factors are seen to be linked to the eventual homelessness of individual applicants by a chain of events, the practice of judging intentionality being a subjective assessment of the individual's competence in negotiating between external and discursive demands.

The judgement of intentionality is therefore dependent on 'fixing' a point in what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) refer to as a 'chain of equivalence'. It is this chain that constitutes an identity under an externalised banner, the differentiated outside grouped together in opposition to the legitimate homeless. At this point the excluded pole of identity becomes constructed as directly opposed to a legitimate position. In discussions of social policy, this has often been referred to as the deserving/undeserving opposition, a directly antagonistic relationship. Consequently, we can see that the varying causal factors, the differential 'outsides', are grouped together not necessarily as a threat to those deemed to be deserving of assistance, but as a threat to the provision itself. This has frequently proved problematic for local authorities, who have to consider how far back on such a 'chain of equivalence' the issue of intentionality should be judged. For example, to refer back to the example of the soldier leaving the armed forces and claiming accommodation in Wales, his intentional homeless ruling referred to his discharge from the army for failing a drugs test (WAG, 2004).

If we accept this proposition, that the judgement of intentionality effectively demands the judgement of the 'constitutive outside', then a fundamental question arises about the nature of the 1977 Act. As we have seen, the JCG's agenda of shifting responsibility for provision from welfare to housing was central to the process of transposing the conditions of circular 18/74 into law. In essence, this agenda proposed that homelessness was a phenomena caused by structural failure to provide decent, plentiful housing, rather than a result of individual choices.

However, the analysis that has been provided of the judgement of the 'outside' within the terms of intentionality casts doubt on this conclusion. Clearly, the consideration of factors that may well be only linked to housing by the failure to pay rent goes beyond the structural remit and into the realm normally assessed by social services. In this respect we

can view the 1977 Act as a departure from previous legislation for the homeless, but a departure that does not so much invalidate the deserving/undeserving oppositions of previous policy as move the responsibility of judgement from welfare to housing offices. The antagonistic relationship between deserving or undeserving applicant therefore remains enforced by legislation, despite what can be referred to as a structuralist agenda.

It is at this point that the cultural construction of undeserving positions becomes central to analysis. Whilst the availability of housing stock clearly impacts on local authority decision making, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this is the only variable in a process governed by a consistent application of a nationally constructed stereotype. The judgement of the intentionally homeless is likely to be influenced by local cultural understandings as well as local structural differences and it is for this reason that the next section will concentrate on the *framework* that differentially constructs undeserving positions across geographical areas.

Cultural Norms and Political Exclusion

The construction of stereotypes surrounding homelessness is well documented in existing research. For example, Cowan (1997) draws attention to media portrayals of ‘scrounging’ welfare recipients and notes that such stories tend to increase in both volume and severity in times of housing crisis.

‘..by castigating certain sections and portraying them as the most undeserving, one is also arguing that they are not deserving of accommodation; so the issue of supply was routinely avoided in debates. It seemed that the implicit belief was that there would be enough accommodation to meet the need of other, more worthy, groups’ (p.160).

In this sense intentionality, moral culpability, becomes a justification in itself for exclusion. Cowan draws attention to three major groups: squatters and travellers, beggars and asylum seekers. He examines the coverage of these groups by the press (particularly the right-wing press) and documents a coverage of homeless issues which portrayed these groups within the context of a debate on welfare 'scrounging', a popular issue in the press during the 1990's. Thus the focus on individualistic factors is seen to detract attention from a real structural deficit and form an identikit picture of what Cowan calls an 'inappropriate' applicant (p.141).

This account therefore reflects the extent to which a dominant perception of the homeless in both popular and political discourse led to the formation of more punitive legislation. The key issue in this account concerns the manner in which popular stereotypes served to justify a particular type of social policy; the extent to which there was a direct correlation between the groups warned against in debates and the trends legislated against in the eventual *Housing Act 1996*. In particular, this points to the political influence of certain stereotypes, the extent to which the perceived characteristics of individuals and groups are used to justify a 'minimalist' stance regarding provision. As we have seen, the chief justification that was given for this agenda was the alleged abuse of homeless legislation by those seeking to gain accommodation by intentionally becoming homeless.

However, the central concern of this section is not the content of stereotypes, but the manner in which they are formed and the influence that they hold over the construction of social identities. This is not to say that representations of the homeless on a national scale are unimportant; clearly this is not the case. Instead, this section will accept the findings of previous research and attempt to place these constructions within a theoretical framework that will account for differential interpretation of individual responsibility for homelessness. In this sense the competition between individualistic and structural conceptions of homelessness is important, but it is the 'play' between these two poles that allows normative boundaries to be (temporarily) formed and a dominant discourse on homeless issues to begin to emerge.

Because the judgement of intentionality is ultimately subject to the local authority's discretion, the formation of social identities is unlikely to be solely governed by political rhetoric or media stereotypes. These factors are undoubtedly connected to policy, either as an influence or a justification, but it would seem unlikely that stereotypes are interpreted in uniform manner, particularly by those who work with the homeless. Cowan (1997) has noted the outcome of such decisions are likely to be influenced by a combination of stock availability and cultural expectations, but the important point for this section is that whilst stock availability differs between local areas, *so do cultural understandings*.

Intentionality decisions are therefore relative, in the sense that the merits of applications are considered with reference to both the availability of local housing and the local cultural norms. Such a judgement can be seen to be an act of power, as to deem certain situations to be constitutive of a deserving position requires that a temporary boundary divides this position from other cases. As we have seen, this is the condition for revealing antagonisms, as the contested nature of this exclusion can only be partially resolved. As Mouffe (2000) notes:

‘If collective identities can only be established on the mode of us/them, it is clear that, under certain conditions, they can always be transformed into antagonistic relations. Antagonism, then, can never be eliminated and constitutes an ever present possibility in politics’ (p.13).

One can therefore refer to local antagonisms as the conditions that govern the formation and re-formation of social identities within a given area. It is at this point that we return to construction of privileged and subjugated identities, but what is important to note is that the act of power necessary to form such positions is driven in part by a differential normative criterion; a local cultural understanding of acceptable reasons for homelessness. It is therefore important to consider the working of a discursive system that constructs social norms. It is through the consideration of such a model that behaviour can be judged to be

acceptable or unacceptable, this consideration being the bedrock of intentionality rulings. The work of Foucault (1967, 1972) is useful in this task as the model of discourse that he presents is the model that Laclau and Mouffe adhere to. As such, this model focuses on the discontinuity of discourse, the breaks and ruptures that characterise a differential system.

Foucault's accounts of discursive formations concentrate on the manner in which dominant ideas about a given subject emerge, primarily across different historical periods. For instance, in *Madness and Civilization* (1967), Foucault charts the development of forms of knowledge surrounding madness that produce a discursive subject or identity. What is central to this account is the idea that such discursive knowledge is accepted as truth, that the characteristics attributed to mental illness become 'common sense' within the context of a historically specific discourse. This 'constructivist' position is of course a familiar one, its basic proposition being that identities are formed by reference to social norms that are temporarily constituted and require the framework of a given discourse to be meaningful, or indeed acceptable. By extension, the construction of the intentionally homeless requires reference to discursive knowledge, in this instance the stereotypes that Cowan refers to, the same set of beliefs and differences that were instrumental in the formation of the test for the 1977 Act.

Madness and Civilization therefore holds a certain amount of resonance when discussing perceptions of normal behaviour, but for the purposes of this analysis, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) has a more direct significance. It is in this study that Foucault attempts to set down the methodology of his previous work and discuss the discursive patterns and rules that lead to the development of a form of normative knowledge. Central to this work is Foucault's conception of the 'rules of formation' of a given discourse, the relationship between discontinuous elements of a discursive system (p.44). These rules impose a temporal unity onto discourse, its constitution based on the dependent relationship between elements, which Foucault labels as objects, statements, concepts and strategies. A discourse is therefore characterised by the links between its various elements, each linked to and dependent on each other.

However what is critical for this section is the manner in which these relationships are modified, as a change to individual elements demands a new series of connections. Thus discourse cannot be considered to be fixed in its content:

‘A discursive formation, then, does not play the role of a figure that arrests time and freezes it for decades, or centuries; it determines a regularity proper to temporal processes; it presents the principle of articulation between a series of discursive events and other series of events, transformations, mutations and processes. It is not an atemporal form, but a schema of correspondence between several temporal series’ (p.83).

This is an important point, as it highlights both the changeable content of discourse and the way in which elements from other discursive formations can have an influence. This refers back to the manner in which the ‘constitutive outside’ influences the formation of discursive knowledge, as to include a new concept or statement necessarily influences the connections and inference within the formation.

Thus within Foucault’s theory there is the proposition that different discourses may influence each other at certain points. This clearly has implications for a theoretical approach to the analysis of intentionality, as various forms of knowledge surrounding the homeless are likely to differ according to various links between related discourses. However, whilst Foucault generally connects this theory to historical periods, the system of discourse that he presents can equally apply to varying values across geographical locations. Indeed, in an interview with geographers from the journal *Hérodote*, he acknowledges that the logical conclusion of a circular conception of power is that discursive knowledge is not only constructed across time, but also across space:

‘The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces. There is

much that could be said on the problems of regional identity and its conflicts with national identity' (Foucault, quoted in Gordon, 1980, p.74).

It is in this way that it is possible to identify a discursive framework to the judgement of intentionality that is not totally driven by legislation, political statements, press representation or available housing, but rather a combination of these factors. The implications of Foucault's conception of discourse point to a knowledge that is informed by too many elements to be totally unified, or to be interpreted uniformly through different regional environments. The crucial factor in this theory is the loose and flexible formation of elements; the tenuous links that impose a structure on an otherwise discontinuous collection of positions. By this reasoning, intentionality appears to demand an extremely relative judgement; one that is subject to discursive demands that are beyond the control of the applicant.

Intentionality in the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003

The *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* has made widespread changes to the judgment of intentionality in Scotland and offered an alternative to the framework described above. Firstly, it has removed the obligation placed on local authorities to investigate an applicant's intention to become homeless and replaced this with a power to do so in certain circumstances. This is primarily a practical measure, a mechanism whereby local authorities can save time and resources by not investigating the intention of an applicant in cases where it is deemed to be unnecessary.

This measure clearly illustrates that in the view of the Scottish parliament, the judgement of intentionality is irrelevant in many cases. In addition to this, the act also increases the duty of local authorities towards those who *are* deemed to be intentionally homeless. Those in this situation are offered a short Scottish secure tenancy, a conditional agreement that sets out the obligations of the applicant and the support that will be provided for this period. Subject to the applicant fulfilling his/her responsibilities during this time,

the short tenancy will be ‘upgraded’ to a full Scottish secure tenancy. Should the individual fail to meet their responsibilities in any way the local authority only has a duty to provide temporary accommodation.

In relation to these changes the concept of the ‘constitutive outside’ assumes a slightly more complex character. The changes to the intentionality ruling in Scotland differ from those concerning priority need, as whilst the latter presents a relatively simple alteration supported by a realisation that priority need demands a false distinction between applicants, the changes to intentionality propose that for those deemed to be intentionally homeless the consideration of the reasons for that homelessness is a proper and practically efficient course of action. Thus the ‘constitutive outside’ becomes central, not in a prohibitive manner as a measure to enable the exclusion of the undeserving, but as a yardstick against which future behaviour can be judged.

The previous sections of this chapter highlight the extra-discursive nature of the judgement required by intentionality, the establishment of a criterion of eligibility based on factors that lie beyond the boundaries of what could be referred to as housing discourse and the underlying assumptions of the legal changes in Scotland do not alter this position. In many ways, the changes to Scottish legislation present a selective view of homelessness as a phenomenon that is essentially agency-based, as the underlying assumption is that individuals can modify their behaviour when faced with their ‘last chance’. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the intentionally homeless have always been considered to be responsible for their own housing situation by the very nature of the category and the changes to Scottish law do not alter this position.

However, the act as a whole is reflective of the belief that homelessness cannot be considered to be a phenomenon that can be explained by structural or agency based factors in isolation. As we have seen, the overall tenor of the act is one of increased rights for the homeless, the dissolution of exclusionary categories. This is contrasted with the approach to intentionality which, although unquestionably more inclusive than its predecessor, ultimately retains a focus on individual conduct and accepts that some applicants will require support and behavioural boundaries in order to sustain a tenancy. In this way the act

accepts the relevance of agency-based factors, reflecting the views of Neale (1997), Pleace (2000) and others, but retaining an overall focus on preventing exclusion. It is also significant for the part that individuals can play in promoting their own claims to housing; the formation of a short secure tenancy offers the chance for the homeless to negotiate their own housing rights. I will refer back to this point in chapter 8, but for the moment I want to continue to focus on the extent to which these changes offer a re-evaluation of the conditional nature of homeless policy.

Indeed, opponents of the changes to intentionality were generally apprehensive because the proposals weren't conditional enough. One concern frequently voiced in debates on the bill related to the possible conflict between the national focus on anti-social behaviour and the new rules on intentionality. Early objections from the Social Justice Committee centred on a perceived imbalance between rights and responsibilities, in that those made homeless following eviction for anti-social behaviour would effectively receive no punishment for their improprieties, as the local authority would still have an obligation to offer a secure, albeit conditional, tenancy. This situation was eventually amended, as Margaret Curran MSP stated in the final debates:

'The committee's report emphasised two areas: resources to support the bill and the general housing supply, and the need to balance rights and responsibilities. On the latter point, we lodged stage 2 amendments making it clear that the small minority of people who have a proven history of anti-social behaviour will not have an automatic right to access a short Scottish secure tenancy with support. Instead, they will be able to access only non-tenancy accommodation as a matter of course' (SPOR, 5th March 2003, col. 19030).

Theoretically, the passage of this amendment presents an interesting further illustration of Foucault's (1972) 'rules of formation'. Chiefly, the change to the proposal resulted from a clash between different departments; it is notable that the Scottish

Conservatives did not oppose the stage 1 version of intentionality, indeed they supported its proposed decentralisation of decision making. The opposition to this measure came from those in the Social Justice Committee who feared that the homeless legislation could undermine their work on anti-social behaviour, a sentiment that led Margaret Curran MSP to counter:

‘I assure the Parliament of my view that anti-social behaviour is wholly unacceptable. We are determined to tackle anti-social behaviour and to reclaim our neighbourhoods for the decent, law-abiding majority’ (SPOR, 18th December 2002, col. 16457).

From this point on the preventative agenda concerning anti-social behaviour appeared in the form of the aforementioned stage 2 amendment, detailing that local authorities would have no duty to re-house, despite Shelter’s contention that this consideration was inappropriate in homeless legislation.

As noted in the previous section, Foucault (1972) contends that discursive formations do not develop in isolation of one another.

‘..discursive practices modify the domains that they relate to one another. It is no use establishing specific relations that can only be analysed at their own level- the effect of these relations is not confined to discourse alone: it is also felt in the elements that they articulate upon one another’ (pp. 83-4).

In this instance, it is the relationship between the domains of the Social Justice Committee and the Homelessness Committee that led to the eventual amendment. What is notable is the perceived opposition between the two discursive formations, the inclusive agenda of proposed homelessness legislation on the one hand and the punitive action of anti-social

behaviour orders on the other. It was this clash, in Laclau and Mouffe's terms, this antagonism that resulted in the exclusion of anti-social tenants from automatic homeless provision.

It is also interesting that this amendment centred on one particular subject position, the anti-social tenant. No other groups received such special attention, which is particularly notable when it is considered that anti-social tenants make up an extremely small proportion of overall homeless cases. The Scottish Council for the Single Homeless (2002) state that, on average, a Scottish local authority may expect to handle seven cases of this nature each year.

Again, the decision to exclude those who become homeless through anti-social behaviour can properly be described as a political concession, driven by an external criterion. As noted above, the changes to intentionality are intended to *correct behaviour*, to allow individuals a 'second chance' to sustain a tenancy, and as Margaret Curran MSP noted, this is precisely the opportunity to be denied to this group.

'We will ensure that tenants who have specifically been identified as anti-social cannot play the system of second chances through our provisions on intentionality....However, in so doing, I am anxious not to devise a system whereby anti-social tenants can disappear into the private sector or into sub-let properties to cause misery among another community of neighbours' (SPOR, 18th December 2002, col. 16458).

The point here is not to comment on ethical implications of anti-social behaviour, but to note that the judgement required in this instance is of a realm beyond a pure housing discourse, whereas the 'punishment' for this form of behaviour is a probable spell in temporary accommodation. This exclusion potentially lasts for three years from an eviction, which may simply displace the problem, rather than offering the possible solution of Scottish secure tenancies.

Despite the inconsistency in the treatment of applicants evicted for anti-social behaviour, the *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* considerably increases the rights and life-chances of those deemed to be intentionally homeless. Its approach to intentionality uses the 'constitutive outside' not as a justification for exclusion, but as a basis for negotiation. In this way, the act properly considers both structural and agency based causes of homelessness, and uses these to allow individuals to collaborate in improving their housing situation.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the theoretical issues inherent to the concept of intentionality. Beginning with a definition of this test, together with the conditions of its emergence, this chapter again noted the formation of a binary opposition which resulted in the exclusion of those deemed to be responsible for their own homelessness. The concept of antagonism, the force that can dislocate or stabilise identities, was then introduced into this discussion. In particular, the judgement of the constitutive outside of housing discourse was seen to be instrumental in sustaining an exclusionary framework. Furthermore, the judgement of this outside was seen to be differential across both time and geographical locations. Following this, the changes to Scottish law were considered. Again the role of the constitutive outside was seen to be relevant, with reference to the separate rules for those evicted following anti-social behaviour orders. However, the overall structure of provision for the intentionally homeless was seen to extend the boundaries of inclusion and allow individual applicants a greater stake within the housing system.

So far the analysis of a conditional system of homeless policy has detailed the manner in which applicants have to fulfil certain criterion regarding both their individual characteristics and past behaviour, in order to qualify for housing assistance. The nature of this policy, the manner in which it divides applicants according to a politically constructed agenda, has been analysed through the application of Radical Democratic Theory. In the next chapter, the final category, that of local connection, will be discussed and the manner

in which this conditional framework is continued through the judgement of geographical location will be highlighted.

Chapter 7- Local Connection

The third category to be examined is that of local connection. As the name suggests this is a measure whereby a local authority may refer an applicant to a different authority depending on their ties to the area in which they are applying. As such, local connection works in conjunction with two tests described in the previous two chapters; its chief function is to determine the location of re-housing for those applicants accepted as homeless.

The test of local connection differs to the previous categories in two important ways. Firstly, the test of local connection is overtly descended from the systems of parish relief going back to the Elizabethan Poor Laws. Arden (1988), for instance, cites Lord Denning's contention that this measure is 'curiously reminiscent of one of the features of the old Poor Law 1601, whereby paupers could be sent back to the parishes where they had a settlement' (p.85). Thus, whilst priority need and intentionality requires a judgement of circumstance and behaviour respectively, the requirement of a connection to a local area demands a judgement concerning the proper location of an individual.

In this way it is possible to see local connection as a measure of structural control, a mechanism for the geographical regulation of provision, and as an addition to the conditional agenda identified in the previous two chapters. As with the previous two categories, an individual local authority's duty does not extend to those deemed to have 'failed'; those who have an insufficient tie to the area to justify re-housing. In contrast to the previous two categories, the local authority discharges its duty by referring the applicant to what is deemed to be the appropriate authority. Ostensibly at least, the stakes are not as high because as one authority's duty ends, another's begins.

Therefore in contrast to the measures discussed in the two previous chapters, the test of local connection is not one that leads to exclusion by itself. However, as we will see, a referral to another local authority may result in a different ruling with regard to the applicant's intention to become homeless. It is at this point that the chain can come to an end and the situation reverts to that described in chapter 6. However, any exclusion from

provision is achieved in conjunction with other categories and not as a direct result of the test of local connection.

This process has some implications for the differential nature of decision making described in the last chapter, as clearly geographical difference has an impact on the uniformity of provision. In addition to this, the issue of location is also one that impacts heavily on the potential success of re-housing, obviously an individual is more likely to sustain a tenancy when in proximity to available services, employment and support networks. However, the success of re-housing may also be dependent on acceptance within a new local area and therefore a consideration of the impact of antagonism is necessary.

This chapter will therefore study the politics of local connection, beginning with an examination of its historical roots. In particular, the connections between the early forms of local connection will be considered in relation to the reasons for the inclusion of the local connection test within the 1977 Act. Following this the framework of geographical difference identified in the last chapter will be related to local connection and the practical and theoretical implications will be considered, particularly with relation to the manner in which discursive formations can be dislocated by antagonistic relationships between the homeless and the local community. Finally, current policy developments in the Scottish parliament will be placed within this paradigm.

Space, Power and the History of Local Connection

The issue of geographical location has a long history in approaches to vagrancy and homelessness. This agenda was continued in two senses by the 1977 act, both by the inclusion of a need for applicants to prove a 'local connection' and by the opportunity for variation in decision making between local authorities. This variation actually has wider implications than a simple concern over local connection, it incorporates the differences in housing stock between local authorities and the previous decisions over such issues as 'vulnerability' or 'intentionality' that have set precedence in a given area. The extent to which local connection acts as a conditional test in the manner described in the previous

two chapters will be considered later in this chapter; initially I want to set out the historical and political grounding of a need to prove a connection to a local area.

The legal enforcement of a connection to the area in order to qualify for assistance dates back to the parish relief systems of the old Poor Law, as does the reluctance of local authorities to provide assistance to those not directly linked to the local area. Those not deemed to be affiliated with the parish ran the risk of punishment under the various vagrancy acts of the time, punishments that frequently resulted in slavery and sometimes hanging for persistent offenders. Indeed, Woodbridge (2001) notes that from 1547 ‘poor laws came in pairs, one setting down penalties for the vagrant poor, the other providing relief for the settled poor’ (p.15). It is through this practice that it is possible to see the roots of the distinction between the housed poor and the homeless, a duality that was identified as a theme of current research in chapter 1.

The undeserving/deserving opposition in Elizabethan England was therefore upheld through reference to a criterion of *mobility*. Contemporary fears about vagrants spreading sedition have been noted in chapter 4, but the initial point in this chapter concerns the punitive approach to the unsettled poor, in contrast to the relief granted to those settled in a particular area. In its most basic form this trend highlights a political construction of a normative boundary, the norm in this case being an affiliation with a local area in opposition to a discursive ‘other’, the subversive, promiscuous and criminal vagrant. Woodbridge’s comments on the response to the problems of vagrancy in Elizabethan England are interesting in this context, as she notes the manner in which the undeserving were so-labelled because of the perceived ‘aimless’ nature of their movement (p.254). In this way she proposes that vagrancy was seen as ‘the dark side of the Renaissance’; in that the homeless were viewed as symptomatic of a society in which the dominant cultural values were changing and society wished to restore a degree of normality (p.254).

It is possible to draw a parallel between an agenda that places emphasis on a rational motive for travel and the reasoning behind the modern category of local connection. The local connection clause in the 1977 Act stresses that in order to qualify for assistance, the applicant first has prove a degree of affiliation with the area through either family,

employment, personal history or ‘special circumstances’ (DOE 1977, s 18). Thus the emphasis is placed on an applicant’s reason for applying in a particular location, as well as their reason for leaving the previous area.

Certainly, the assessment of motivation for travel was a key issue in the consultation period of the 1977 Act and the consideration of local connection resulted from a concern that certain authorities acted as ‘magnets’, due to their location. Partington (1978) notes that this conclusion was not backed up by statistics of the time and points to figures that showed 92% of accepted applicants in 1976 had applied in their area of residence (p.48). Furthermore, an amendment was proposed to exclude gypsies from re-housing over fears that the bill could provide ‘a charter for someone to buy a second-hand caravan and move around the country to the area that they liked most’ (quoted in Richards 1981, p. 72). This amendment was eventually dropped, as the inclusion of a need to prove a local connection made its measures redundant, but clearly a judgment remained concerning the motives for travel.

It would appear therefore that ‘aimless’ wandering of Elizabethan vagrants was re-interpreted as a conscious decision, by some homeless applicants, to move to certain areas. What remains consistent between the two periods is the judgment of stimulus for mobility. As we have seen, the Elizabethans disapproved of ‘aimless’ wandering not necessarily because it was unmotivated, but because it could *mask* a criminal or political motivation. In the same way, local connection prevents movement to guard against certain local authorities becoming overwhelmed by applications; those who do not have what is considered to be a legitimate reason to be in a certain place are treated the same as those who may be seeking to abuse homeless legislation. Thus whilst local connection ostensibly judges movement, it is ultimately the intention of the applicant that is under scrutiny. As in the case of intentionality, this bears some resemblance to Foucault’s (1972) ‘rules of formation’, as whilst the definition of ‘acceptable’ movement has changed through time, the ultimate formation based on an either/or judgement that excludes the discursive ‘other’ remains the same.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the judgement of intention requires a normative criterion to be judged against. In this case, the reasons for a local connection hold some significance as they form the normative guidelines by which an individual's claim for assistance can be assessed. Fundamentally these guidelines attempt to return an applicant to their 'home'; this being assessed in respect of a family connection, or a long standing residence in an area. However, such considerations are overlooked if the applicant has employment in the area to which they are applying. Thus if the applicant can be considered to be an economic asset to the area, then no further proof of local connection is required.¹²

As in the case of priority need, local connection also allows for some local authority discretion in assessing claims. 'Special circumstances' in this case was designed to include those who may have had reason to move to area, but for whom events dictated that assistance would be needed. Consequently, we can see a similar situation to vulnerability, as whilst local authorities were given set criteria against which applications could be judged, the interpretation of 'special circumstances' determined whether discretionary cases could be accommodated.

Initially we can see local connection as a tool by which local authorities could limit their responsibility to re-house applicants through defining the boundaries of their area and the criteria by which an individual can be said to belong in that area. Indeed, Richards (1981) claims that the introduction of local connection effectively removed the responsibility for provision that was enforced by the National Assistance Act 1948. Further back in history, Beier (1985) highlights that under the old poor law, assistance was granted to the poor in both their 'birthplace *or* their last place of residence (p.11 author's emphasis). Whilst it would be inaccurate to suggest that the levels of provision available at these times were in any way comparable to those granted under the 1977 act, the stipulations over *where* an individual qualified for assistance appeared to have tightened.

However, whilst the above indicates the development of a structural system of spatial control, the operation of local connection offers more subtle variations than can be accounted for within such a rigid framework. The next section will begin to outline some of

¹² This issue will be considered further in relation to homelessness and citizenship.

these variations and place local connection within the theoretical model that has been advanced thus far, assessing the extent to which a differential model of discourse highlights the capricious effect of local connection in determining deserving and undeserving identities in a particular area.

The Constitutive Outside and Local Connection

In one sense, and as in the case of intentionality, the inclusion of local connection lends a further conditional aspect to the ‘right to housing’ proposed by the JCG. To relate this concept to the earlier application of the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1990), we need to return to the role of the constitutive outside in ‘blocking’ the realisation of an identity. In this case, the role of the outside is more literal, as applications can be judged on geographical grounds. The outside in this sense considers the personal history of the individual’s location, relating this to criteria under which a local authority has a responsibility to re-house. Thus we can see this measure operating in conjunction with priority need and intentionality, producing a judgement of individual characteristics, individual behaviour and proper location.

This variation in decision making also applies to rulings on intentionality, particularly with regard to the manner in which local authorities exercise their discretion over interpreting individual cases. As noted in the previous chapter, the availability of local housing stock, as well as local interpretation of intention, is likely to hold considerable influence over the authority’s decision making. Again this situation has a tradition stretching back to the Poor laws, for example Beier (1985) highlights the variable interpretation of poor relief by different parishes, stating ‘a beggar relieved as a poor traveller in one village might be arrested (for vagrancy) in the next’ (p.32).

This also highlights the central facet of identity construction, namely its contingent nature. As we have seen, the various ‘outsides’ that are considered in the judgement of intentionality are likely to be interpreted differently across different geographical locations, with the boundaries of what constitutes a legitimate position negotiated through a number

of localised factors. The point on the chain of equivalence at which the judgement of intentionality occurs is therefore likely to vary, but the net result of this decision remains the same. Thus, it is possible to speculate that whilst different ‘outsides’ are judged by different authorities, the underlying moral judgment of intention differs only by degrees.

Therefore, the judgement of the proper location of an applicant’s claim for assistance is dependent on the consideration of the constitutive outside, the applicant’s intention in coming to the area. However, this framework can be inverted in cases where applicant cannot return to the area in which they have a local connection. In the original terms of the 1977 Act an applicant who is deemed to be at risk of domestic violence does not have to prove a local connection, provided the local authority to which they are applying is satisfied that there is a risk of the continuation of domestic violence if the applicant returns to their ‘home’ area.

This exemption from local connection was increased by the *Homelessness Act 2002* to include victims of violence in a more general sense, with the expressed intention to include victims of racial harassment or anti-social behaviour within provision.

‘..the perpetrators (of violence) are not always members or ex-members of the family. Racially motivated violence in particular can be a depressingly familiar fact of life for far too many people... No one should have to live under the shadow of violence, whatever its motivation. There is no rationale for distinguishing between a risk of domestic violence and any other form of violence’ (Ms. Keeble MP, SCD, 10th July 2001, clause 10).

In such cases the test of local connection demands that the authority in receipt of the original application enters into negotiations with the authority to which the applicant has a local connection, to determine the likelihood of the violence reoccurring if they return to the area. In this case the constitutive outside can be used as a criterion for *inclusion* within a particular area, an instance in which the status of the applicant as a victim of violence can

lead to an acceptance of their own choice in the location of their assistance. As noted in the introduction, this measure also exemplifies the time-specific nature of definitions as racial violence was not considered as a justification for applying to a different area in 1977.

Consequently it is possible to identify a judgement of the constitutive outside, of personal circumstance and history, in the same way as it is with regard to intentionality. However, as with intentionality and priority need, this judgment is not a fixed construct to be applied universally to all homeless applicants, it is subject to external pressure with respect to the location of the homeless. The next section will examine a particularly contentious example, that of asylum seekers, and highlight the role of political and social antagonism in influencing the proper location of applicants.

Asylum Seekers and Local Antagonism

As we have seen, the test of a local connection necessarily demands that an individual can claim a right to be in a certain area. This may be because of employment, family or length of residence, but ultimately the test determines the proper location of provision and, by extension, the proper location of the individual applicant. However, as the above case of those fleeing violence illustrates, for some applicants it is not possible to return to the area in which they may normally be housed.

The negotiations that establish the eventual location of provision therefore determine local authority duty. In this case a conflict of interests may occur, between authorities who are short of stock, or who receive external pressure to re-house those who may be seen as undeserving applicants. This can result in the formation of antagonistic relationships between homeless applicants, who may be seen as ‘scroungers’ or may be unwelcome in the area for some personal characteristic, and the local community.

One of the more controversial examples of this relationship concerns the re-housing of asylum seekers. This category refers to those who are waiting to have their claim for asylum judged. Initially housing and benefits for this group are handled by the National

Asylum Support Service (NASS).¹³ This service provides accommodation for asylum seekers, either in the controversial ‘detention centres’, or in temporary accommodation provided through arrangements with local authorities.

The relationship between asylum seekers and the communities to which they are sent can properly be classed as antagonistic in many cases. Asylum seekers are not classed as homeless and are only housed temporarily whilst their claims are processed. Nevertheless, their presence still provokes considerable unrest on both national and local levels. The issue of location is central in this instance and is one that can result in an antagonistic relationship between the local community and the asylum seekers.

Examples of hostility towards asylum seekers are widespread. Perhaps the most high profile of these cases emerged in Kent during the late 1990’s. The ports along the south coast experienced an influx of asylum seekers during and after the end of the Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian War in 1995, and this provoked some racial tension. In 1998, the *Dover Express* ran an editorial that caused national controversy:

‘Illegal immigration, asylum seekers, scum of the earth drug smugglers, have targeted our beloved coastline. We are left with a nation’s human sewage and no cash to wash it down the drain’ (*Dover Express*, 1st October 1998).

This was not an isolated sentiment, further stories emerged documenting clashes between locals and asylum seekers and in 1999 the National Front organised a march through the streets of Dover which resulted in confrontation between marchers and anti-fascist groups. This occurred against a background of rising concern surrounding asylum issues, with opposition politicians accusing the government of accommodating too many asylum seekers. Following this, the *Homelessness (Asylum-Seekers) (Interim Period) (England)*

¹³ This provision has a varied history over recent years. The *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999* removed asylum seekers right to standard benefits, placing these payments in the hands of NASS. The support payment equals about 70% of income support.

Order 1999 introduced powers to allow asylum seekers to be dispersed, with particular reference to reducing the numbers in London and Kent.

For those individuals sent around the country, the situation can be very similar. A Kenyan woman, Kamwaura Nygothi writing in *The Guardian*, documented a series of racist incidents following her dispersal to Middlesbrough. On her arrival she was presented with a leaflet that warned of potential racist abuse and attacks, but stated that ‘while members of the team are happy to listen your concerns, they can’t deal with non-emergencies’ (*The Guardian*, Thursday 8th July 2004). Other incidents, such as the murder of an asylum seeker in Glasgow, would appear to suggest that antagonism exists in areas beyond London and Kent; indeed Nygothi states that:

‘In London, where I was initially placed, I felt safe for the first time in years. There is a large Kenyan community there: it’s an environment where people from many different backgrounds mostly live peacefully together and where there are support services for traumatised asylum seekers, including the only services in the country for female asylum seekers who have been raped’ (*The Guardian*, Thursday 8th July 2004).

Such cases illustrate what Mouffe (2000) refers to as the ‘ineradicable character’ of antagonism and power (p.21). As we have seen, the idea of radical democracy is based on multiplicity; antagonism being the force that prevents a ‘total’ vision of society. In this case, the emphasis on irreducible social relations can seem like a dangerous idea, After all if antagonism is an ever-present feature of social relations then there appears to be no theoretical grounds to condemn the type of discrimination experienced by asylum seekers themselves.

Mouffe (2000) attempts to clarify this position, by distancing herself from the post-modern perspective that views democracy as pluralism without limits; as an endless conversation. Whilst she accepts that antagonism cannot be eliminated she contends that a

limitless perception of pluralism underestimates the role of power in producing subordinated identities. Antagonistic relationships do not necessarily emerge between parties of equal influence and to ignore these inequalities is tantamount to supporting existing hierarchies. In such a position:

‘There is only a multiplicity of identities without any common denominator, and it is impossible to distinguish between differences that exist but should not exist and differences that do not exist but should exist’ (p.20).

Thus in the case of Kamwaura Nygothi such a perspective would not be able to distinguish between the rights of the asylum seeker to live free from discrimination, and the attempts of racists to constitute their own particular nationalistic identity, by ridding their community of immigrants.

Therefore Mouffe is mindful that ‘no social agent should be able to claim any mastery of the *foundation* of society’ and the limit of pluralism necessarily occurs at the point where one group attempts to assert this claim (p.21, author’s emphasis). Whilst antagonism is ever present and can only be suppressed by the domination of particular identities, the project of radical democracy should provide a set of institutions through which claims can be ‘limited and negotiated’ (p.22). In this way antagonisms can be judged against an external, institutional, ethical criterion.

The example of asylum seekers provides an extremely visible illustration of the antagonistic politics involved in placing a group within a certain locality, of the opposition that may arise within local communities. What is really at stake in these cases are the different interpretations of a legitimate reason to become part of a given community, a judgement of the constitutive outside that can also apply to more conventional homeless cases, for example offenders housed within local communities. The work of Mouffe highlights the need for institutional support for subordinated groups, crucially noting the

irreducible nature of antagonism in this context and the importance of the role of the state in mediating between opponents.

The Suspension of Local Connection in Scotland

The previous sections have highlighted the role of the constitutive outside in the judgement of an applicant's proper location, both in terms of local authority decision making and the opposition of local communities that may influence decision making. With respect to these issues it is worth dwelling on the potential impact of policy changes in Scotland, as this legislation attempts to dispense with judgments of this nature.

The previous discussions of the *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* show a piece of legislation that has attempted to abolish, or at least reformulate, the conditional nature of homeless policy. In this light it is hardly surprising that the act suspends the local connection test, with the option to re-activate it if an area is seen to attract a disproportionate number of applications. The reasons behind this suspension are varied, but chiefly the change is geared to the overall aim of the act; namely increasing the rights of homeless people. In particular, it was felt that suspending the local connection test would enable applicants greater choice in choosing a location where they had the greatest chance of settling and sustaining a tenancy.

Interestingly this measure was undertaken on the assumption that most applicants, faced with greater choice, would simply apply to their own local authority:

‘In 2001-02, only 2.1 per cent of all homeless applications were referred to another local authority. The homelessness task force found that the greatest cause of dissatisfaction concerned where people were housed, which could be a huge barrier to feeling settled, particularly among those who were housed away from their home areas’ (Mr. Kenneth Gibson MSP, SPOR, 18th December 2002, col.16463).

Therefore, the homeless task force were able to recommend the suspension of local connection in the knowledge that relatively few applicants would take advantage of the greater choice on offer. This is in some ways reminiscent of ‘Tenant’s Choice’, a scheme introduced by the Conservative government through the *Housing Act 1988*, in which tenants were given the opportunity to transfer from the local authority to a private landlord. The scheme failed, as the majority of tenants felt they had little incentive to change and exercise their new rights. Thus, the difference between the two instances is related to the expectation of the government, as whilst the Conservatives felt that most would want to exercise choice, the changes to local connection in Scotland were introduced on the understanding that very few applicants would actually move out of their local area. In this light it is revealing that the local connection test is suspended rather than repealed, and should too many applicants want to switch areas, there remains the opportunity to re-introduce the test at either a national or local level; an option explicitly referred to during debates. This echoes King’s (2003) concern that the application of the concept of choice within third way housing policy can be misleading; in the case of choice based letting offering the applicant an illusion of choice whilst retaining the hierarchical structure of landlord/tenant relationship that existed under points based schemes.

Opponents of the suspension generally ignored the issue of choice and focused on the same issues that were prevalent during debates prior to the 1977 act. Again the notion of certain local authorities attracting an unworkable number of applications was referred to:

‘For example, in its evidence to the committee, Highland Council talked about the lack of available housing in our less-populated rural areas. Highland and island life can be particularly attractive to many, but one or two families can deplete the stock of social housing’ (Mrs Lyndsay McIntosh MSP, SPOR, 18th December 2002, col. 16467).

The response to this point highlighted that of the few homeless people that apply outside of their local area, a very small proportion head to the highlands and islands of Scotland, in fact the majority head for Glasgow where there are more services and a perceived greater chance of employment.

A point more pertinent to the concerns of this chapter relates to the possible local effect of any increase in applications from outside a given area.

‘Local authorities will no longer be able to investigate the local connection of an applicant or refer that applicant to another locality where they are deemed to have a connection. COSLA stated that some of its members:

"..have expressed concerns regarding the impact of the suspension of the local connection and the potential impact on the balance and sustainability of local communities"' (Mr. Kenneth Gibson MSP, SPOR, 18th December 2002, col. 16463).¹⁴

In one way this statement refers back to the issue of supply and demand, but the reference to ‘balance’ in the community can be seen as revealing in the context of this chapter. Specifically the concerns of the local authority relate to potential disruption in local communities as a result of an influx of homeless applicants.

The implications of this position connect to the earlier discussion on antagonism between homeless applicants applying outside their local area and some people within that local area. The notion of balance in this sense is central, as it is the balance of an identity, its temporary constitution; that is ruptured by antagonism. This is not to suggest that those from outside of the community necessarily act as aggressors, indeed the reverse is more likely to be the case. However, in the case of an ex-offender being housed within a local area, any aggressive reaction to that individual is likely to polarise the relationships

¹⁴ COSLA- Committee of Scottish Local Authorities

between community members in a similar manner to which it polarises the relationship between the community and the applicant.

Therefore, in the view of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), COSLA is correct to imagine that such an influx may alter the ‘balance’ of the community. However, the re-instatement of local connection would not resolve this conflict, but merely move it to a different location. Here it is useful to refer back Mouffe’s (2000) conception of radical democracy, where institutions are supposed to act in order to restrict this ‘surplus’ of difference and prevent discrimination. It is in this sense that the local authorities themselves have a role to play in ensuring the integration, or at least safety, of the applicant, as well as allaying the fears of some within the community. Clearly this is a resource intensive task and thus it is easy to see the root of local authority objections, as the suspension of local connection removes a measure by which an authority may discharge their duty to an applicant who may demand budget money and staff time.

The suspension of local connection offers the possibility of greater access to sustainable housing for homeless people in Scotland, although it is debatable how much difference it will actually make given that the majority apply within their local area. It is also merely a suspension, there are no commitments to repeal as in the case of priority need and indeed, the suspension was partially enacted on the understanding that it would not make a great deal of difference. Consequently it remains to be seen if there will be an influx of applications to certain local areas, or if this relocation brings about more of the type of antagonistic situations highlighted throughout this chapter. In that case, the local connection test may be reinstated and legislation may return to its pre-2003 state.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the major issues involved in the judgement of local connection, with particular reference to the theoretical framework put forward thus far. Initially local connection was defined in relation to the parish relief systems of the old Poor laws. A common assessment of the intention behind mobility was noted in both time

periods, a judgement that again can be seen as a normative judgement. The concept of antagonism was again used to illustrate the problems faced by many applicants who are bound to a local area, with specific reference to asylum seekers. Such instances were seen to be important, as they illustrate how the confines of local connection can exacerbate antagonisms. Equally, the response of Mouffe (2000) to such a situation was seen to be important, as she advocates an imposed limit to antagonism in this context. Finally, the suspension of local connection in Scotland was seen to be a beneficial step in allowing applicants to pursue their best chance of sustaining a tenancy, either through proximity to friends or services, or the possibility of employment. However, this endorsement was tempered by a degree of caution, as heavy mobility is likely to lead to the reintroduction of the local connection test.

The previous three chapters have sought to identify a conditional approach to homeless policy, in which applicants who do not fulfil particular criterion with regard to circumstance, behaviour and location are excluded from housing assistance. However, when the 1977 Act's 'right to housing' is considered, we can also view this as an exclusion from the rights of citizenship. In the final chapter I want to consider the nature of this exclusion in more detail and offer an alternative framework to conditional categories that have identified in the previous three chapters. Specifically this will involve a discussion of radical democratic citizenship and the potential that this model holds for progressing beyond a policy based on the dualism of structure and agency.

Chapter 8- Citizenship and Homelessness

The preceding analysis has attempted to deconstruct homeless policy using the social theory of Laclau and Mouffe, highlighting the exclusionary practices that are inherent to identity formation, as well as the normative assumptions that have led to certain identities being positioned above others in a hierarchy of need.

However, as noted in chapter 3, this theoretical approach has been criticised for the lack of alternative solutions proposed. This is a general problem of the deconstructive approach, for instance Hall (1996) notes that the process of putting essentialist concepts ‘under eraser’ is tempered by the knowledge that there are ‘no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do, but continue to think with them’ (p.1). Laclau (1990) makes a similar point when he notes that whilst privileging the excluded ‘other’ in identity formation can lead to the destruction of hierarchies, these hierarchies are simply re-built with new exclusions.

In terms of homelessness, this argument manifests itself through reference to deserving/undeserving duality. As we have seen, any attempt to privilege the homeless ‘other’ in housing discourse has been met by concerns surrounding the effect on deserving identities; for instance, throughout debates on the 1977 Act opponents of the bill maintained that homeless legislation would effectively exclude those on housing waiting lists by favouring cases of homelessness. Thus, privileging undeserving identities is seen to exclude deserving identities, an inversion that gives rise to the possibility of new antagonisms. To some extent this possibility has been negated by the *Homeless etc. (Scotland) Act 2003*, but as we have seen these changes are to be implemented on a provisional timetable and the reactions of local authorities to their increased duties remain to be seen.

If identities are defined against their discursive ‘other’; if the irreducibility of antagonism prevents the possibility of a fully constituted position, then the theoretical focus shifts to the point of temporary constitution. If we are to avoid Neale’s (1997) ‘circular arguments’ with regard to homelessness, then it is necessary to allow for the multiplicity of

identities whilst ensuring that claims are judged against an external ethical criterion. The practical limitations imposed by the availability of housing stock may mean that a complete departure from conditional homeless policy is unlikely; indeed it may be viewed as ethically undesirable. Therefore the point of temporary constitution, the criterion by which an identity is judged to be deserving or undeserving, becomes central to analysis.

The key question for this chapter therefore concerns the alternative to conditional categories that is suggested by this position; specifically what kind of approach to homelessness does radical democracy imply? As I have noted in chapter 3, Mouffe (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000) has attempted to address these issues and re-negotiate the relationship between the universal and the particular, specifically through reference to notions of inclusion within the concept of citizenship. This chapter will therefore analyse the manner in which identities can be constituted within the boundaries of citizenship, the consideration of the proper role of individuals in identity formation.

This chapter will begin by providing a brief overview of theories of citizenship and placing Mouffe's work within this context. Following this, the points of association between radical democratic citizenship and the issues discussed in the preceding chapters will be considered along with Mouffe's approach to ethics and its implications for homeless policy. Finally, this model will be tested with reference to Kennet's (1999) account of the version of citizenship implied by the current Labour government.

Perspectives on Citizenship

Notions of citizenship have assumed some importance in social theory in recent years, a development that Isin and Wood (1999) attribute to the increased awareness of identity politics. They identify an increased awareness of group rights and note struggles to include issues of ecology, sexuality, gender or ethnicity within the national polity. Debates over citizenship therefore reflect struggles over identity, as the increased prominence of claims for group rights highlight the existence of exclusions from the political sphere. As we have seen in chapter 3, Marx (1977) suggested that citizenship is a concept that attempts

to formalise rights in order to separate the public and private spheres, this severance acting to present the illusion of equality in legal terms, whilst preserving sources of power within the private realm. However, the emergence of rights claims from diverse and differentiated groups would appear to cast doubt on this conclusion, as a demand for rights based on an assertion of a group identity suggests a challenge to the hierarchies of 'private' power.

Although recent discussions of citizenship frequently spill over into debates on identity, the two concepts retain significant differences. Firstly, citizenship is a legal concept that sets out who is covered by its terms. It is frequently pointed out that citizenship should encompass debates surrounding inclusion and belonging, but 'ultimately citizenship allows or disallows civil, political and social rights and obligations in a polity' (Isin and Wood 1999, p.19). This is the first point in discussing citizenship, namely that at its base it is a concept that results in a tangible inclusion or exclusion from legal rights. As Turner (1990) notes, sociological and legal conceptions of citizenship are inextricably linked, the former acting as a 'gateway' to universal rights and duties.

Theories of citizenship are ultimately concerned with *who* qualifies for these legal rights. The issue of inclusion has been the red thread running through this thesis and therefore conceptions of citizenship hold some significance for the discussion of homelessness. For example Rowe *et al.* (2001) document the need to integrate homeless people suffering from mental illness within housed communities and the beneficial effects that this inclusion may have for individuals. In this sense they are referring to 'citizenship opportunities'; opening up the possibilities for citizenship to foster a sense of belonging for the homeless within the community (p.18). Alternatively one can point to the exclusion from the legal rights of citizenship that homelessness can present, for example the 1977 act's proposed 'right to housing' suggests a natural entitlement for citizens, an entitlement that can be prevented by the conditional nature of housing policy. However, this example also highlights the precarious nature of inclusion within the terms of citizenship, as such a right did not exist before the 1977 act and the terms of qualification within homeless policy have altered in subsequent years. Consequently the extent of citizenship, the role of individuals suggested by differing perspectives, deserves some consideration.

Broadly speaking, theories of citizenship can be divided into communitarian and liberal perspectives, although these two labels mask a diverse range of thought in both schools. To begin with liberalism, Isin and Wood (1999) note four common features of liberal thought. Firstly, they point to the 'moral primacy of the person against any claims to social collectivity', a view that stresses an equality of opportunity rather than outcomes (p.143). Therefore, liberalism is democratic in allowing all citizens equal rights regardless of social position, and universal in that it emphasizes the common features of human nature over social and cultural specificities. This view is also progressive; 'it affirms the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements' (p.143). Consequently, at the heart of liberal conceptions of citizenship lies a view of individuals endowed with natural democratic rights; the manner in which these rights are conceptualised assuming some importance.

Liberal thinkers such as Nozick (1974) place an emphasis on negative rights, in that individuals are entitled to be free from coercion. As King (2003) notes, this emphasis has the advantage of ensuring that rights 'do not clash', as whilst state interference impinges on the rights of all citizens, 'these thinkers would argue that the enjoyment of life, liberty and property by one does not deny it to others' (p.53). However, this view can be challenged, albeit in an indirect way, by reference to the declining stocks of social housing in the wake of the 'right to buy' initiatives of the 1980's. In committee debates for the *Homeless etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* the issue of resources provoked some concern, as dwindling stocks of local authority housing threatened the proposals to re-house the homeless.

'Does the member agree that, during the Conservatives' term of office, about 350,000 houses were taken out of the social rented market through the right to buy? Does she recognise that the incidence of homelessness went up to a record level during that time? Does she recognise the correlation between the lack of housing and the length of housing queues?' (Tricia Marwick MSP, SPOR, 18th December 2002, col. 16469)

In this case, it was state interference that allowed some individuals to enjoy 'life, liberty and property', whilst simultaneously denying this possibility to others in the future. This highlights a central problem for the liberal perspective, as the emphasis on individuality over social or historical factors means that this perspective ignores the role of power in privileging some identities over others.

As we have seen, King's (2003) use of Waldron's arguments has shown that the concept of negative rights is useful as a defence against the coercive tactics employed against rough sleepers, but there is also a major drawback to its application in this instance. Negative rights can only allow for the protection of an individual to pursue their own ends; the liberal rejection of equality of outcome prevents citizenship meaning anything beyond a universal freedom from coercion. In this sense, Marx's earlier critique of the concept still applies, as whilst the protection of negative rights for rough sleepers provides a legal equality with the housed population, this equality is strictly limited to the public sphere. For many rough sleepers attempting to pursue their own ends within the private sphere, for instance to find housing or employment, a whole host of difficulties, prejudices and issues of individual competence are likely to dictate. Thus, in this context the liberal acceptance of inequality coupled with the promotion of negative rights is likely to lead to the continued exclusion of the homeless.

In this sense a more inclusive citizenship for the homeless demands a corresponding focus on positive rights; the legal entitlement to services or goods. Perhaps the most famous account of citizenship in this context is that of Marshall (1992), who attempts to address the issue of social inequalities within liberalism. Turner (1992) notes that the basis of Marshall's thought lies in the 'liberal tradition of James Mill and J.S. Mill' and his fundamental concern lay in the perceived gap between social equality and individual freedom (p.35).

Marshall divided citizenship rights into three spheres; those of civil rights, political rights and social rights. He identified the emergence of civil rights in Britain around the eighteenth century, this sphere corresponding to the liberal concern of freedom from coercion, protected by equal access to the legal system. The second sphere, political rights,

concerns individual involvement in the political process. The strengthening of political rights is situated at the around the end of the nineteenth century, illustrated by increased electoral rights for workers. Finally, social rights are conceptualised as rights of entitlement, specifically to welfare provision in post-war Britain. It is in this final sense that the advent of homeless legislation can be considered to promote 'a right to housing', as it is a social right of homeless citizens to be re-housed. However, as we have seen this right is far from universal and therefore illustrative of Marshall's contention that social rights exist in conflict with the minimal liberalism of capitalist society. In some ways it is this conflict that provides the site for struggles over homeless identities, as we have seen definitions of homelessness emerge at the point of compromise between those seeking to enforce the social rights of the homeless, and those whose primary concern is to prevent the unwarranted applications and therefore limit state spending. The re-housing of the homeless therefore requires a focus on positive rights, an idea that appears to sit uneasily with the liberal perspective, due to the tension between positive and negative forms of liberty.

A second perspective on citizenship, that of communitarianism, has developed an extensive critique of liberalism, although Delaney (2003) notes that this perspective has developed in opposition to Rawls (1971) rather than classical liberalism. The chief disagreement between the communitarians and liberals occurs in the different conceptions of the purpose of citizenship, as whilst we have seen the liberal emphasis on the freedom of the individual, communitarians believe that individual citizens should act in such a way as to further the 'common good'. Therefore the conflict between liberals and communitarians lies in their respective prioritisation of individual liberty and utilitarian aims. The communitarian perspective dispenses with the idea of an autonomous individual, whose identity is formed prior to policy and who should be free to pursue their own diverse interests. Instead, this perspective adheres to a version of citizenship that presents an individual who is embedded in the social practices of their specific culture, and for whom citizenship represents a common identity that overrides all other associations or desires. As Sandal (1998) states:

‘..to say that the members of a society are bound by a sense of community is not simply to say that a great many of them profess communitarian sentiments and pursue communitarian aims, but rather that they conceive their identity- the subject and not just the object of their feelings and aspirations- as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part’ (quoted in Isin and Wood, 1999, p.8).

In some respects this perspective is closer to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) than the individual bias of liberalism, as identities are culturally defined rather than autonomously chosen. However, the central problem with this perspective relates to the issue of defining the ‘common good’ and the corresponding erosion of individual liberty that this entails. If we relate this idea back to King’s (2003) use of Waldron’s analysis of the rights of rough sleepers, it is possible to see a justification for the exclusion of rough sleepers from certain public places based on an idea of the common good, whether it is expressed in terms of damage to business, tourism, or the sensitivity of the community. The current Labour government have used such arguments, both against the rights of rough sleepers to be in certain places (SEU, 1998) and the practice of begging with the recent white paper on anti-social behaviour (Home Office, 2003).

In this way it is possible to see both liberalism and communitarianism as universal conceptions, as whilst liberalism proposes an initial equality of individuals, who are then left alone to arrive at different outcomes, communitarianism envisages a diversity of identities which should be superseded by a common goal. Consequently, communitarianism proposes a citizenship that is not only universal in terms of individual outcomes, but also in terms of individual aspirations. The desire to protect communities through reference to a common good promotes a necessarily exclusive vision of who should belong within such communities. It is at this point that the communitarian model ceases to be useful for the study of homelessness, as we saw in the case of local connection it was concerns over community stability that formed a justification for the exclusion of homeless people from particular areas. In this very literal sense, the notion community is destabilised by what it lacks and efforts to preserve community identity will therefore be

overdetermined boundaries, with the expressed aim of excluding those who are perceived to be 'other' to a particular notion of the common good.

Both liberalism and communitarianism contain elements of a citizenship that may be helpfully applied to homelessness. The liberal emphasis on freedom from coercion draws attention to the manner in which the homeless can be discriminated against, whilst the communitarian critique highlights the need to take account of group rights. However, the weaknesses of these perspectives discussed in this section, the liberal disregard for the role of power in constructing subjugated identities and the communitarian repression of difference, highlight the need to move beyond this model. In the next section I want to consider how Mouffe's (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000) notion of citizenship and belonging within a political community may be useful in overcoming these difficulties and providing a framework whereby the needs and rights of the homeless can be adequately addressed.

Radical Democratic Citizenship and Homelessness

In chapter 3 I began to outline Mouffe's approach to citizenship in order to bring her development of radical democratic theory to its current point. In this section I want to expand on this position and highlight the manner in which Mouffe's later work attempts to address the tension between individual rights and the common good, as well as the early criticisms aimed at radical democratic theory. In order to begin this analysis I will briefly re-state the development of this idea of citizenship and situate it within the debate outlined above, before applying it to some the issues in homeless policy identified thus far.

The central thesis of Mouffe's approach to citizenship rests on the idea of antagonism. In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) approach to social identity, antagonism was the force that caused the re-negotiation of privileged identities in relation to the discursive other, either to reassert the existing hierarchy or to negotiate a new one. The antagonism of Mouffe's concept of citizenship has the same binary roots; two opposite poles compete for ascendancy within a political community. In the previous section we saw how the

communitarian notion of equality of outcome conflicts with the liberal acceptance of agency-based inequalities, the resulting balance between the two perspectives having profound implications for inclusion within the terms of citizenship.

Mouffe (2000) takes this duality a step further and applies it to the notion of liberal democracy. By their very nature the two constituent parts of this concept are opposed, the rights of the individual represented by liberalism against the common good of the people within a democracy. Thus any attempt to assert the dominance of one side results in the subordination of the other, and the possibility of antagonistic reprisals. Throughout this thesis this situation has revealed itself as the very possibility of homeless policy, the adversarial relationship between advocates of minimal or comprehensive legislation, individual rights or the common good, agency-based or structural explanations of homelessness.

Mouffe's starting point is Rawls' contention that individual rights cannot be overridden for the sake of the common good. However, she stops short of endorsing what she sees as Rawls' absolute prioritisation of individual rights, as 'it is only through participation in a community which defines the good in a certain way that we can acquire a sense of the right and a conception of justice' (Mouffe 1992a, pp.230-1). In this way Mouffe recognises that the content of rights are specific to a particular political arrangement, that of liberal democracy. It is at the point of identification with this system that Mouffe sites the concept of citizenship, although crucially she believes that citizenship should not be seen as an identity in the sense that it dominates over social allegiances. Rather it is seen as a common point of appeal, guaranteed through reference to the opposed aims of liberty and equality, for individuals to be able forward claims for positive rights.

The advantage of this form of allegiance for the study of homelessness is that it stresses the pluralism inherent to the liberal model whilst retaining a semblance of the communitarian adherence to the concept of equality. The emphasis on plurality retains an important feature of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy's* (1985) critique of Marxism, namely a distrust of oppressive and authoritarian measures. This can be seen to be important for the study of homelessness in sense that it protects freedom rights and guards

against the type of coercion identified by Waldron (1993). Indeed it is possible to compare this element of radical democratic citizenship to Marshall's (1992) conception of civil and political rights, in the sense of an appeal to the liberty element of liberal democracy. Mouffe considers this to be the platform by which groups can negotiate more positive, social rights, but her portrayal of the manner in which inclusion can be achieved has provoked some criticism. Isin and Wood (1999) highlight this point when they accuse Mouffe of conflating citizenship and identity, as despite her intention to avoid exclusion they claim that citizenship becomes an identity that trumps all other associations. Mouffe's refusal to insist on differentiated citizenship for subordinated groups provokes particular criticism, as by ignoring the particular demands of specific groups she is seen to fall into the liberal trap of ignoring power relations.

This is of central importance to the study of homelessness, as a model of citizenship that cannot adequately address existing inequalities is of little use in this context. Certainly Mouffe (1992a) is adamant in her criticisms of the liberal disregard of power, of the manner in which inclusion and the expansion of citizenship rights is viewed as a painless transition. Equally, Mouffe insists on a universal allegiance for subjugated groups, formed on the basis of the equivalence of their exclusion. Her refusal to insist on a differentiated citizenship is justified on the grounds that such a concept would essentialize identity and constitute it in opposition to a 'normal' citizenship.

Isin and Wood (1999) claim that this highlights the manner which Mouffe fails to recognise that 'certain identities are built as durable dispositions via practices that should be used as resources rather than differences to be effaced' (p.13). In this way Mouffe's refusal to differentiate identities through the concept of citizenship is seen to be a suppression of difference. However, she maintains that the promotion of difference should be encouraged, not through a formalised, differential citizenship, but as a consequence of multiple interpretations of the common values of liberal democracy.

'In a liberal democratic regime we can conceive of the *respublica* as constituted by the political principles of such a regime: equality and liberty for all. If we put such a

content in Oakeshott's notion of *respublica* we can confirm that the conditions to be subscribed to and taken into account in acting are to be understood as the exigency of treating others as free and equal persons. This is clearly open to potentially very radical interpretations. For instance, a radical democratic interpretation will emphasise the numerous social relations where relations of domination exist and must be challenged if the principles of liberty and equality are to apply' (Mouffe 1992a, p.236)

In this sense citizenship does not represent a differential set of rights and duties by which an excluded group may achieve inclusion, but rather a set of rules, a commitment to a political system which allows differences to flourish within certain limits. As shown in chapter 7, certain situations, such as the example of the antagonistic relationship between asylum seekers and local communities, require that institutions intervene on the basis of these rules in order to prevent discrimination.

As I noted in chapter 3, it is the relationship between the universal agenda of liberal democracy and the particular demands of citizenship that leads Mouffe to reformulate the association between the public and private realms of citizenship. Instead of the distinction between the two spheres supported by liberal doctrines, or the collapse of the private into the public that is implied by the communitarian position, Mouffe (1992a) considers a perspective in which the 'wants, choices and decisions are private because they are the responsibility of each individual but the performances are public because they are required to subscribe to the conditions specified in *respublica*' (p.238). As shown in chapter 3, this position has the effect of expanding the political arena as the assertion of identities can be viewed as political and challenges to power relations can be instigated from within the cultural or social spheres.

This notion of private informing the public is potentially useful for the study of homelessness and can be illustrated by reference to the provision for the intentionally homeless in the *Homeless etc. (Scotland) Act 2003*. As we saw in chapter 6 this mechanism judges the private decisions of applicants in the same way as its English equivalent, but it is

the public results of those decisions that are relevant. The central difference between these two cases is that whilst both systems consider that intentional homelessness is a transgression of the terms of citizenship, in that it is seen to constitute an illegitimate claim against the state and therefore an infringement against the liberty of individual tax payers, the Scottish example does not consider this to be a justification for exclusion. In such a case, the judgement of the public results of private decisions is seen to hold the key to the prevention of future homelessness for that individual and therefore provide the framework by which that individual can negotiate a positive right to housing. The conditionality of short secure tenancies is therefore imposed as a necessary limit to endless re-negotiation and the individual applicant is given a chance to address the reasons their homelessness.

The Scottish approach to intentionality can therefore be seen to address some of the issues highlighted in this chapter; furthermore it provides an illustration of some potential benefits in applying Mouffe's model to homelessness. The desire to overcome exclusionary practices is illustrated through the refusal to immediately bar the intentionally homeless. Equally, applicants are afforded the opportunity to negotiate their own rights, admittedly against a criterion of responsibility rather than need. Finally, the conditionality of the short tenure implements the necessary limits to pluralism that Mouffe discusses.

Radical democratic citizenship therefore holds a number of advantages in overcoming the shortcomings of perspectives on homelessness identified in chapter 1. It attempts to marry a focus on equality with an encouragement of plurality, in the knowledge that the nature of antagonism prevents the final resolution of the conflict between these two ideas. Instead citizenship acts to provide the rules of negotiation between the two poles, effectively offering the opportunity to overturn existing hierarchies. In the last section I want to test these ideas by examining one of the few pieces of relatively current research on homelessness and citizenship, written with reference to the current government.

Kennet and Radical Democratic Citizenship

Kennet's (1999) analysis of homelessness, citizenship and social exclusion presents a thorough investigation of renegotiation of citizenship rights in the wake of the breakdown of the post-war consensus and identifies the emergence of a *conditional* citizenship based on the assumption of active citizens. Drawing on the example of 'welfare to work' programs under the Labour government, she identifies the goal of citizenship as the promotion of 'entrepreneurial' values and highlights the situations of those who fail to attain the economic standards prescribed by policy. In particular she focuses on the coercive response to rough sleepers, who she argues are perceived as a threat to the prosperity of the city precisely by their presence in spaces that are intended for encouraging investment. Such tactics as the 'zero tolerance' of street homelessness and begging are perceived as symptomatic of the wider focus on responsibility within citizenship.

In relation to this work, Mouffe's account of identity formation provides a useful critique in clarifying the changing balance between rights and responsibilities that Kennet identifies. Central to this account is the consideration of the extent to which subjugated identities destabilise more privileged positions. In this case, the coercive tactics employed against rough sleepers can be seen as an attempt to fix the positive position of the business community against the corresponding negative identity of the homeless. This in turn can be seen to be justified by the wider focus on responsibility within welfare discourse and a conception of social rights based on 'contractual relations and coercion' (Kennet 1999, p.53).

Superficially, the model of citizenship that Kennet criticises holds a number of similarities to Mouffe's perspective, in particular the requirement for 'active' citizens as opposed to the 'passive' recipients of welfare rights implied by the post-war consensus. However, Mouffe's activism is based on political participation, whilst Kennet notes that citizenship rights are denied to rough sleepers as a consequence of their failure to contribute economically, an ethos that Kennet links to the conditional nature of rights under new Labour's 'welfare to work' schemes. This is an important point, as Mouffe is damning in her criticism of economic liberalism, hypothesising that the neutral state has emptied

politics of 'its ethical components' through its focus on economics (Mouffe 1996, p.22). Mouffe's conception of an active citizen therefore demands inclusion based on political activity, situated within a broader definition of the terrain that is considered political.

The central objection to existing models of citizenship and social exclusion that Kennet expresses relates to an inability of policy to relate to 'the multidimensional nature of contemporary homelessness' (p.54). Mouffe's conception of citizenship as a forum through which debates over identity and belonging are (temporarily) resolved, addresses this situation through a focus on plural identities and competing rights claims. It is important in this context to view each identity, not as a total, fully formed position, but as an *overdetermination*, a position that is destabilised by its 'lack' (Mouffe 1992b, p.11). It is this approach that avoids the exclusion inherent in unitary identities and invites the possibility of negotiation between subject positions, a framework that allows for the acknowledgement of differential causes of homelessness.

Related to this point is Kennet's assertion that existing policy does not 'utilise the existing social networks and (limited) resources that exist among the homeless themselves' (p.54). As we have seen, Mouffe's critique of the utilitarian aims of communitarianism stresses that the negotiation of terms of citizenship should occur through the assertion of identity politics. This means that the very terrain on which identities are contested becomes political and therefore constitutive of citizenship. In this sense, projects that attempt to allow individuals to develop their own sense of self-identity can play an important role, in that through the constitution of an identity an individual can assess their own priorities with regard to citizenship. One such project is the arts centre set up by Newport Action for the Single Homeless, a centre set up with the aim of helping the homeless re-integrate themselves back into the community through art based activities, or more vocational training aimed at increasing the prospect of employment. The fundamental concern of such projects is to provide an environment that stresses the multiplicity of associations, as well as aspirations. Likewise, whilst such projects take account of plural identities, they also encourage the use of the 'existing social networks' that Kennet refers to. The separation of

public and private spheres that Marx criticised as a central facet of citizenship is negated, precisely because the affirmation of identities constitutes political involvement.

This is why this version of citizenship can be potentially useful in addressing homelessness. The insistence on applying unstable, overdetermined identities overcomes some of the exclusionary and coercive practices that Kennet identifies. Likewise, the expansion of the political develops the possibility of allowing social networks to develop, with the negotiation of identity representing the first step in an improvement of actual social positions.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to ally a focus on contingent identities to universal political concept, with the aim of suggesting a theoretical framework which can best represent the needs of the homeless. Citizenship was considered to be useful term in this context, as it is an individual's status as a citizen that entitles them to certain rights. This can be seen to mirror the central concern of this thesis, namely access to the 'right to housing' promised by homeless legislation.

The notions of inclusion and belonging were therefore seen to be central to both a discussion of citizenship and the aims of this thesis. The key perspectives on citizenship were therefore discussed and the implied roles of individuals outlined. A liberal perspective was seen to be helpful due to its emphasis on individual liberty and the corresponding acceptance of diversity. However, this focus on individuals was also seen to ignore power relations and it was felt that homeless issues needed to be considered from within a perspective with a more positive conception of rights. The communitarian perspective allowed for such a conception, but the adherence to a 'common good' was seen to be potentially troublesome, particularly as it is the construction of such normative boundaries that have been seen to exist at the root of the exclusion of 'undeserving' identities.

Radical Democratic citizenship was therefore suggested as a framework to reconcile the aims of the liberal and communitarian positions. This perspective takes the tension

between the individual liberty of liberalism and acknowledgement of social power within communitarianism, and proposes that this is site of citizenship. In particular, the competitive nature of rights claims is emphasised within the ethical boundaries of liberal democracy, a perspective that suggests an empowering position for the homeless. This perspective was then tested against Kennet's (1999) critique of citizenship under New Labour, the key advantages being an emphasis on preventing coercion and a corresponding allowance for diversity of identities. In this way, such a perspective suggests a less repressive approach to homelessness, one that recognizes different circumstances and allegiances and uses these as basis for differential rights claims. It is through the recognition of such claims that the exclusion of the homeless can be challenged and homeless policy can become a more contextually sympathetic vehicle.

Conclusion

‘Here, take this purse, thou who the heavens’ plagues
Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched
Makes thee the happier. Heavens, deal so still!
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see,
Because he does not feel, feel your pow’r quickly!
So distribution should undo excess
And each man have enough’ (*King Lear*, 4.1, 63-70)

Gloucester’s identification with the homeless represents an inversion of his opinion exhibited through the early acts of *King Lear*. His imprisonment and torture for assisting the traitorous Lear lead to him to understand the precarious nature of privilege and reassess his attitude towards the poor. He is blinded and made homeless, but his initial shock in finding Lear being cared for by a beggar is eventually replaced by a more compassionate position. Thus, Gloucester’s (and indeed Lear’s) reappraisal of the nature of poverty leads them both to advocate ‘distribution’, if not through the state then through private charity.

This illustrates a central point of this thesis, namely that the extent of provision is inextricably linked to the common assumptions surrounding the homeless, that definitions of homelessness are a product of the context of their formation. This thesis has aimed to critique the possibility of an objective measure of homelessness, as such a judgement has been seen to be dictated by social and political forces, be they on a national level in terms of policy definitions, or the local interpretation of such boundaries. In particular, this thesis has shown how such judgements are invariably based on binary oppositions and that the application of such a framework can lead to seemingly arbitrary exclusions.

Therefore a crucial aspect to this thesis has been the production of meaning in a political context, the manner in which the normative boundaries of homelessness have changed according to dominant beliefs surrounding the personal responsibility of individuals and the extent and nature of state assistance. This is the central tenet of the social constructionist perspective and as such is not in itself a new insight into homelessness. As we have seen throughout this thesis, both Cowan (1997) and Jacobs *et al* (1999) have drawn attention to the manner in which homeless policy is not created in a vacuum, but is both constrained and influenced by public and political conceptions of homelessness. However, this thesis has built on such previous research and placed such insights within an explicit theoretical framework, addressing the lack of theoretical research on homelessness identified in chapter 1.

In this conclusion the major points of the thesis will be outlined in relation to the three key characteristics of identity formation as presented by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). I then want to highlight the main strengths of a theoretical analysis of homelessness and look at some of the areas that are left untouched by an investigation of this nature. Part of this analysis should reflect on the suitability of radical democratic theory for the study of homelessness, as well as considering other contexts to which this theory might be usefully applied.

Summary of Findings

At the end of chapter 3 I outlined three main characteristics of identity formation and used homeless policy in subsequent chapters to illustrate their function and contextual effects. The central feature of this account concerned the manner in which discourse frames a given context within a binary opposition, with each side defined against its polar opposite. Laclau (1990) notes the influence of power in the temporary constitution of meaning, the way that one side becomes privileged in relation to its 'marked' other and it is this process that can illustrate the role of social or political power in the continued exclusion of certain groups.

In relation to homelessness Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) critique of the necessary act of power required to sustain a hierarchical binary opposition was applied to the three major conditional concepts in homeless policy. The central objection to these categories was that in dividing applicants into deserving or undeserving subject positions, homeless policy acts to present an objectified view of homelessness that cannot represent the contingent nature of social relations. Whilst the criterion for inclusion within the categories of priority need, intentionality and local connection have changed over time, what has remained consistent is the conditional framework itself.

Therefore the changes to policy definition appear to negate the possibility of an objective view of homelessness, as privileged subject positions are overdetermined and therefore destabilised by the elements that they lack. For example, in chapter 4 we saw how the differentiated presentation of the homeless in Elizabethan England justified both their exclusion from relief and continued punitive measures against vagrancy. It is this formation that is the site of overdetermination, as the excluded position acts to destabilize its opposite and therefore this proposition was used to show how the excluded, undeserving identity undermines the legitimacy of deserving positions.

Social antagonism was also seen to be useful in this context, as the force that disrupts temporarily constituted identities. It is this concept that was seen to reveal the precarious nature of privileged identities and provide the basis to overturn existing hierarchies. The relationship between these two concepts can be seen in the re-negotiation of definitions of homelessness. For instance with reference to priority need categories, the original terms of the 1977 act prioritised a parent with dependent children, whilst the *Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002* expanded this grouping to include sixteen and seventeen year olds in their own right. In this case the original category is destabilised by what it lacks, namely children who are too old to be housed by social services, but do not have a parent to qualify them for housing. In this case the privileged position is overdetermined, as it is possible to argue that the child without a parent is in greater need of accommodation. It was the explanation of the tension between

these two positions that led to the identification of an antagonistic relationship and resulted in the reformulation of definitions.

These three concepts were therefore central to this thesis, in that they explain how boundaries are both constructed and re-negotiated. The consistent reformulation of definitions was seen to be evidence of both the overdetermined nature of identities, as well as the antagonism that results from excluding an ostensibly similar subject position. Radical democratic theory therefore offers the possibility of analysing the changing normative boundaries that dictate the terms of inclusion within a polity. A focus on identities as temporarily constituted through social power allows radical democratic theory to negate binary opposition by highlighting the tension between the rival poles, and the instability that is inherent to any resulting position.

The two concepts of antagonism and overdetermination were applied to various examples in homeless policy, with the particular aim of criticising the manner in which an essentialized, objective definition of homelessness leads to the formation of a conditional framework. In this way, the 1977 Act was criticised for the manner in which a political agenda influenced the formation of definitions, leading to limits being placed on provision. In particular, an essentialist view of individuals led to the development of a framework in which the circumstances, personal history and location of applicants were subject to official judgement. It is the exclusion that results from a judgment of this nature that is important in this context, as it is this factor that reveals the overdetermination of identities.

This critique was then applied to the three conditional categories in homeless policy with the aim of showing how overdetermined subject positions allowed individuals to be perceived as deserving or undeserving of assistance. The criterion for inclusion was revealed to be an unstable construction, interpreted differently across different locations. This phenomenon was seen to be illustrative of Foucault's (1972) account of discourse, the model of discourse endorsed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), in which different elements relate to each other in different ways, but are ultimately unified by 'rules of formation'. Therefore, the different factors that may be present in the judgement of homelessness, for example the available housing stock of a given area, may result in different decisions. What

remains consistent is the framework of that decision making, a conditional approach resulting in the exclusion of undeserving applicants.

It was also proposed that a key factor in this differential interpretation was the influence of other discourses on housing issues. Therefore, in the example of the Scottish reformulation of intentionality, it was the concern over anti-social behaviour that led to a completely different provision for those who become homeless after receiving an anti-social behaviour order. It was this form of intervention that was seen to further illustrate Foucault's vision of unstable discursive formations, united by certain rules of formation, but with influence beyond their own discursive boundaries. From this analysis it is possible to determine several characteristics regarding the relationship between definitions of homelessness and the formation of political identities. Firstly, definitions of homelessness are formulated within a consistent structure, a conditional model which operates through the construction of a binary opposition. Therefore applicants can be classified according a deserving/undeserving criterion, the consistency revealed through the exclusion of subjugated identities.

Secondly this analysis reveals the content of definitions of homelessness as unstable paradigms; the ultimate formation of an identity is seen to be governed by contrasting and fluctuating elements. This contingency applies to both the emergence of policy definitions and their eventual interpretation by local authorities. With respect to policy, this thesis has revealed the various influences on the criterion for inclusion within provision, these influences ranging from the ideological standpoints of individual politicians, the dominant concepts in political discourse at a given time, the strength of public opinion, or even macro-economic factors. What is important is that these elements do not exist independently of each other; they form a specific discourse on homeless issues from within which a particular perspective on definition emerges. Contingency can also be seen to be the dominant ethic in the interpretation of these definitions; such decisions are likely to be informed by the availability of housing stock, the prosperity of local authority budgets, the historical relationship between elements of the community and certain homeless applicants and even the opinions of homeless decision makers.

From this it is possible to see that definitions of homelessness emerge from a diverse range of areas, from which a number of perspectives can be seen to be influential. It is because definitions represent a loose amalgamation of interests that this thesis has questioned the extent to which it is possible to form an objective definition of homelessness. It has been seen throughout this thesis that such a measure represents an overdetermination, a limit to the diversity of experiences amongst different applicants. Such a system invariably produces judgements, be they of an inclusive or exclusionary nature, that cannot be justified in relation to other cases of a similar nature. Therefore, the essentialist vision of agency identified in English policy could be seen to exclude on a seeming arbitrary basis, whilst Scottish policy reveals a structuralist agenda in which the dissolution of priority need may result some applicants being accepted ahead of those whose need may be greater.

However, whilst this thesis has presented a critique based on the idea that temporary fixing of identities represents a suppressive approach to meaning, chapter 8 attempted to consider a framework through which homelessness could best be considered. In particular this was a task that was seen to be best accomplished by reference to the concept of citizenship, as it is the boundaries of citizenship that determine an individual's inclusion within a polity. The two major perspectives on citizenship, liberalism and communitarianism, were considered in relation to the critique of homeless policy developed through the thesis. In common with theories of identity, the two perspectives were seen to be unhelpful in this context, because of their essentialist view of structure and agency. In particular, a useful approach to citizenship in the context of homelessness was seen to demand recognition of the diversity of individual circumstances, as well as the existing inequalities inherent to such diverse positions.

Radical democratic citizenship was therefore considered for its suitability in this context. Mouffe's (1993) focus on the contingency of identity was seen to allow a necessary flexibility to the concept, which would incorporate a variety of different identities within its terms. The second point; that of combating existing inequalities is less explicitly addressed, but Mouffe's (2000) contention that no individual should be 'able to

claim mastery of the *foundation* of society' adds some guidance in this context (p.21). It is in this sense that antagonism can be assessed within ethical boundaries and existing inequalities can be exposed as the result of power relations. It is through such a consideration that this thesis has attempted to relate what can loosely be termed a post-structuralist critique to a more universal concept. The key advantage of this is that it allows an alternative framework, that of radical democratic citizenship, to replace that conditional, exclusionary agenda identified as the guiding principle of most homeless legislation. This involves a model of citizenship that requires active participation and therefore demands that the homeless have a role in their own re-housing. It is this requirement that shifts this model beyond the structure/agency dichotomy and presents a theory in which individuals can posit their own claim to a right to housing.

Theory and Homelessness

In reflecting on the findings of this thesis it is important to outline why an approach such as discourse analysis has been pursued, the key insights provided by this methodology, as well as the areas left untouched by such an analysis. For example, an obvious limitation to discourse analysis is that whilst this approach can critique the assumptions that lead to the privileging of certain identities over others, it cannot show the effects of exclusion or quantify the number of people involved. Such issues are beyond the scope of this investigation, although as I have shown through this thesis the reaction of those excluded from the terms of citizenship can result in antagonistic relationships and can therefore be influential on the balance of discursive formations. However, this thesis has analysed the formation and re-formation of homeless identities through the examination of political discourse; the possibility of future research that looks beyond the confines of traditional political institutions into the expanded terrain of radical democratic politics will be examined in the next section. The choice of text based analysis rather than undertaking empirical fieldwork is a central issue and in this section I want to reflect on this choice of methods.

In an interview originally published in *L'Express*, Foucault (1995) claimed to be an empiricist. He saw his strategy of advancing theoretical concepts within the context of historical instances as a tactic that did 'not try to advance things without seeing whether they are applicable' (p.40). As I stated in the introduction to this thesis, empirical research and theoretical investigations should not be seen as opposed to each other. Just as empirical facts or observations require interpretation to become meaningful, so a theory has to be applied to a context to be of any practical use. With regard to this thesis it is possible to apply Foucault's argument, as the theoretical framework of radical democracy has been illustrated by what could be seen as empirical examples from policy and debate. However, it is also possible to claim that Foucault underestimated the influence of his own preconceptions with regard to both the interpretation of empirical material, and indeed the selection of which historical examples to investigate. It is for this reason that I stressed the subjective nature of discourse analysis in the introduction, as the key aim of this thesis has not been to outline an objective truth concerning homelessness, but to show how perspectives on homelessness differ across time and space.

This is the major reason why this thesis has contained text-based research rather than empirical fieldwork. The analysis of the formation of normative boundaries requires that the political conditions of emergence are considered. In the context of homelessness, the best indicators of these conditions are to be found in the debates that preceded the formation of policy, the topics discussed and the objections voiced. It is this evidence that provides an insight into the thinking behind a piece of legislation, as well the compromises that are made in its passage to the statute books.

In this respect the selection of theory had an important influence on the use of methods within the thesis, as in the practice of discourse analysis the distinction between theory and method is not always apparent. In his account of discourse theory, Torfing (1999) describes a method that is based firmly within the tradition of textual deconstruction, but where discourse is an entity that is broader than individual texts. Policy documents cannot be considered in isolation of the context from which they emerged; legislation is adapted to suit both the ideological and practical demands of the time that it is

effective. There *is* something beyond the text and it is the influence of discursive formations on both policy and its interpretation that this thesis has attempted to highlight.

It is at this point that it becomes necessary to evaluate the usefulness of radical democratic theory as a tool for the analysis of homelessness. As I have shown throughout this thesis, the theory has a number of characteristics that are ideally suited to this context. Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) conception of identity as an entity formed through difference in a system of binary oppositions can be applied meaningfully to the context of homeless policy and reveal the manner in which subject positions are constructed. Of particular importance in this process is that one position becomes privileged over its binary opposite in a 'violent hierarchy'. Through the analysis of conditional categories in homeless policy, this model has proved to be useful in illustrating the manner in which policy demands that applications are divided according to this hierarchical structure.

As I have already noted, this is not a new insight; the deserving/undeserving dichotomy is well used in studies of homelessness. However, Laclau and Mouffe's work advances a conception of social relations that moves beyond such rigid distinctions and is therefore incompatible with a model of policy that separates individuals in this manner. It is the notion of antagonism that is crucial in this context and separates Laclau and Mouffe's work from other constructivist accounts, as the preceding analysis has shown how antagonism is an ever-present possibility in the formation of privileged positions. It is this power that can disrupt existing hierarchies and force the reformation of definitions of homelessness. There have been several examples through the thesis of instances where policy definitions have been re-negotiated, due to the reaction of those in subordinated positions, or those working on their behalf. The key instances highlighted in this thesis are the formation of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* and the formation of the *Homeless etc. (Scotland) Act 2003*.

One possible criticism of Laclau and Mouffe arises from these examples, as whilst radical democratic theory presents a framework that stresses the possibility of change through social antagonism, their refusal to distinguish between discursive and non-discursive objects means that it is difficult to isolate influential factors in process of social

change. Whilst the theory advanced through this thesis has the capacity to place social change within in a conceptual framework, the reasons behind, for example, the difference between current Scottish and English homeless policy, remain undisclosed. In this case, Laclau and Mouffe's insistence on the irreducibility of antagonism would appear to preclude any attempt to identify and limit influential factors, such as the greater availability of social housing stock in Scotland, or the greater proportion of Labour MSP's. Hall (1988) concurs with this critique, stating that the problem with this thinking is that limitations of entrenched political positions are not acknowledged. In his view, Laclau and Mouffe advance a theory where 'just anything can be articulated with anything else' and the limitations imposed by traditional power structures are unrepresented (p.10). In effect, Hall portrays radical democratic theory as a functionalist perspective, in which social change is unrestricted by existing political contexts.

However, Smith (1998) refutes this claim and notes that Laclau and Mouffe devote a significant portion of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) to an explanation of why antagonism does not always overturn existing hierarchies. Central to this account is Laclau and Mouffe's belief in the multiplicity of social movements, this diversity demanding that each movement is considered in its specific political context. It therefore follows that specific antagonisms should be considered within political contexts, and that some contexts may be more resistant to change than others. As I have already noted, Mouffe (2000), has expanded this position to present an explicit critique of the post-modern notion of democracy as an 'endless conversation', maintaining that certain limits are inevitably placed on the transformative process (p.129).

The twin concepts of difference and equivalence are also influential in the success of overturning hierarchies and this thesis has attempted to show examples of this in relation to homeless legislation. The most famous of these, the work of Joint Charities Group promoting the need for homeless legislation, offers a useful illustration of how the strength of an antagonistic force can have an impact on its eventual success, or otherwise. It was through the formation of a joint group that these charities amalgamated their interests in order to promote the case for legislation, therefore forming a temporary equivalence that

helped create a more effective political campaign. It should be recognised that there were several other contextual factors that may have been influential in the formation of the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977* which have been considered in chapter 5, but the logic of equivalence demonstrates that radical democratic theory does not portray social change as an inevitable, functional process.

The charge that Radical democratic theory does not recognise power of certain entrenched discourses would therefore appear to be overstated. However, the complexity of this conception of discourse does mean that any application of radical democratic theory is unable to offer any form of prediction as to future change. Smith (1998) develops this theme:

‘...there is no guarantee that one specific discourse will defeat all its rivals and become the predominant interpretive framework. The struggles between discourses to become the predominant interpretive framework do tend to reflect the configuration of power relations in a given historical moment, but they are so complex that they we cannot predict their exact outcomes’ (p.57).

In this respect, radical democratic theory cannot predict the direction of social change, or the particular influences that allow existing hierarchies to be overturned. Crucially, Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of discourse of is too broad to enable any conjecture with regard to the likely direction of approaches to homelessness. However, this does not mean that radical democratic theory has nothing to offer policy, as whilst Laclau and Mouffe’s model of social relations is too contingent to offer an accurate forecast of future developments, their model of democracy offers a possible framework to allow citizens to promote their own interests within a polity. This is the framework of Mouffe’s radical democratic citizenship that has been advanced in chapter 8 and its usefulness for the context of homelessness will be assessed below.

With regard to the practical institutions required to operationalise this framework, Daly (1999) rightly points out that radical democratic theory is vague. Likewise, Mouffe's work on citizenship focuses on issues of inclusion and individual liberty, rather than documenting the institutional conditions that would facilitate this. The closest that Mouffe (2000) comes to outlining a conception of institutions, is when the role of the state in providing ethical limits is discussed, with particular reference to its function in mediating between opposed groups (pp.21-2). The state is seen as an arbitrator in this regard, accepting the multiplicity of antagonisms, but stepping in ensure that the claims of oppressed groups are heard.

This could be read merely as support for the institutions of liberal democracy, albeit with an overriding concern for social inclusion. However, Daly (1999) points out that whilst Laclau and Mouffe assert the importance of liberal democratic institutions, they maintain that they can be 'limited and even constraining of democratic advance' (p.80). Furthermore, they are concerned to emphasise that radical democracy demands a growth of the 'spaces' of democracy, which is shown through an expansion of the terrain that is considered to be political (Daly 1999, p.81). Again, the proposed expansion of the spaces of democracy has been shown throughout this thesis, particularly with regard to Mouffe's (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000) notion of the role of citizens in a radical democracy.

Despite this concern for expansion of democratic participation, it would be inaccurate to suggest that radical democracy presents a highly developed idea of institutions. This means that any suggestions for the future directions of policy can only recommend a theoretical framework for developments, rather than having an institutional model to propose. In this sense, radical democratic theory is somewhat non-committal, although Smith (1998) maintains;

'It is entirely appropriate, then, that Mouffe's vision does not take the form of a complete blueprint for a new society; there will always be extensive debate on the meaning of freedom and equality and on the boundaries between the private

individual's liberty and the citizen's obligation, and every general theory will have to be reconsidered to some extent in the light of historical contingencies' (p.128).

This position is certainly representative of the general thrust of radical democracy, but when faced with Mouffe's demand to impose 'ethico-political' limits on debate, the lack of an institutional framework means that it is unclear how these limits could be enforced, or even decided upon (p.238). It is at this point that Daly's (1999) call for the development of more explicit institutional arrangements retains its importance. To some extent, the example of the Scottish approach to intentionality cited in this thesis provides an illustration of how the theoretical insights provided by Laclau and Mouffe may be put into practice, as citizens have a chance to negotiate their inclusion, whilst the ultimate threat of exclusion places a necessary limit on acceptance, and ensures that a requirement for civic responsibility is invoked.

These points lead me to suggest that whilst radical democratic theory provides an extremely useful tool for the analysis of homelessness, further development in this area would be beneficial. Whilst a rigid conception of political institutions may be inappropriate for radical democracy, Mouffe's (2000) recognition of a limit to negotiation demands that a more explicit presentation of institutions is necessary in order for a practical application to emerge. Examples such as the Scottish approach to intentionality are helpful in this project, but a detailed description of the role of institutions would enable a more obvious picture of the possible applications to emerge. Crucially, such institutions would have to ensure adherence to the values of radical democracy, whilst recognising existing power relations and enforcing temporary point of closure. Therefore, the challenge to radical democratic theory lies in the development of institutional arrangements to facilitate the negotiation of inclusion, ensuring the ethical promotion of minority groups.

Suggestions for future research

This investigation has focused on the conditions of emergence for political identities and has therefore used debates surrounding the formation of homeless policy in order show

how definitions are constructed and contested. However, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) expanded definition of the political means that radical democratic theory can also be applied to areas where antagonism may force the reformulation of discourse. For example, I have referred to the work of Rasmussen and Brown (2003), whose investigation into the efforts of local groups in Vancouver to break down barriers between those living with HIV and AIDS and the wider community. This work refers to the ever present possibility of antagonism and the efforts of various groups to re-integrate excluded citizens into the community. As an approach it offers one possible application of the theoretical framework advanced within this thesis and an opportunity to undertake empirical research into the effects on perceptions within a local community where groups working with the homeless have attempted to challenge existing stereotypes. Such organisations as Newport Action for the Single Homeless, the SMart network¹⁵ or Cardboard Citizens¹⁶ are trying to change attitudes by offering the homeless opportunities in art and self-expression. Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) model of identity formation stresses the role that existing assumptions play in upholding hierarchies and therefore the effects of such projects could prove to be important.

The notion of social antagonism also provides the opportunity for radical democratic theory to be applied in other contexts, particularly where there is tension between the local community and an excluded group. In the context of homelessness there are many different examples of such a relationship, some of which have been highlighted through this thesis. For instance, in chapter 7 the issues surrounding asylum seekers within British communities were highlighted and the work of Laclau and Mouffe provides a useful framework for the investigation of such a context on a local level. Likewise, it is possible to apply radical democratic theory to other groups where there is not only an overtly hostile relationship with the local community, but where local authorities receive pressure to exclude certain people. One example that immediately fulfils this criterion is that of gypsies or travellers and the opposition that such groups receive on their arrival in most local

¹⁵ SMart is an umbrella organisation that secures creative arts funding to the socially excluded, including the homeless.

¹⁶ The Cardboard Citizens are a theatre company run by homeless people and based in Southwark, London.

communities. The addition of empirical fieldwork in such cases would allow future research to explore both effects of exclusion and the perceptions that lead to an exclusionary attitude.

Whilst radical democratic theory is useful for the interpretation of the manner in which certain identities become subordinated and the antagonism that can result from this temporary closure of meaning, Mouffe's (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2000) notion of citizenship offers a framework by which the 'other' can begin to negotiate his or her inclusion. In this way it is possible to suggest a framework for inclusion with the expressed objective of breaking down the hierarchies of meaning that sustain antagonistic relationships. This is of particular relevance to groups who may not be excluded as a direct result of policy, as is the case for asylum seekers or gypsies, but who nevertheless feel excluded from either the community or from housing itself. Therefore this model can be used to analyse antagonistic relationships between different racial groups living together on housing estates, or low-paid workers who find themselves economically excluded from housing in rural areas. In both cases the key element of this model is Mouffe's commitment to a citizenship incorporating different identities, linked by a common responsibility to uphold the twin objectives of liberty and equality.

It is in this way that radical democracy offers both a critique of exclusionary practices and a framework through which legitimate inclusion can be negotiated. This thesis has sought to rigorously apply this theory to the example of homelessness and present an argument against arbitrary exclusion from the terms of policy, whilst guarding against the endorsement of blanket acceptances of applications. It is through the consideration of the role of social and political power, the nature of social relations, that individual cases can be considered on their own merit and individuals have the chance to redefine their political identities.

Through the application of this branch of theory, this thesis has added to existing knowledge by presenting an extended theoretical analysis of British homeless policy. The insights contained within this analysis are important because the theoretical model allowed for the consideration of changing normative definitions and therefore challenged the

justification of an objective view of society. Equally, the differing approaches to definition across Britain were seen to highlight the contingency of social relations and further undermine the legitimacy of conditional, exclusionary categories within policy. It is through the consideration of these issues that this thesis has presented a critique of objective measures of homelessness, as such a measure cannot account for the diverse circumstances in which an individual becomes homeless. In this way a deconstruction of homeless policy has been undertaken and the terms and concepts that we use in order to make sense of homelessness have been challenged. It is in this sense that radical democratic theory can be seen to add to our understanding of homelessness, by uncovering the assumptions that lie behind categories in policy, as well as the battles that constantly renegotiate the boundaries of inclusion.

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